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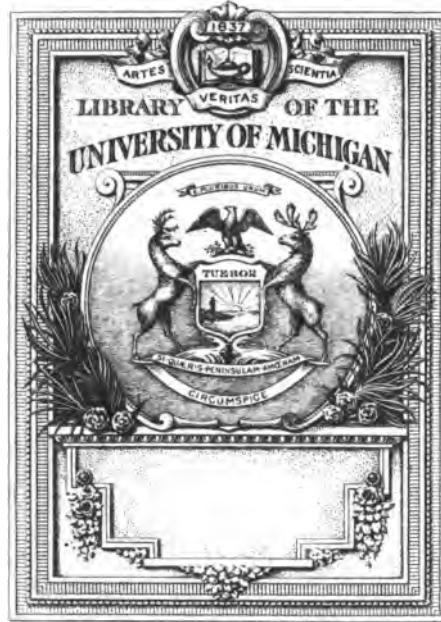
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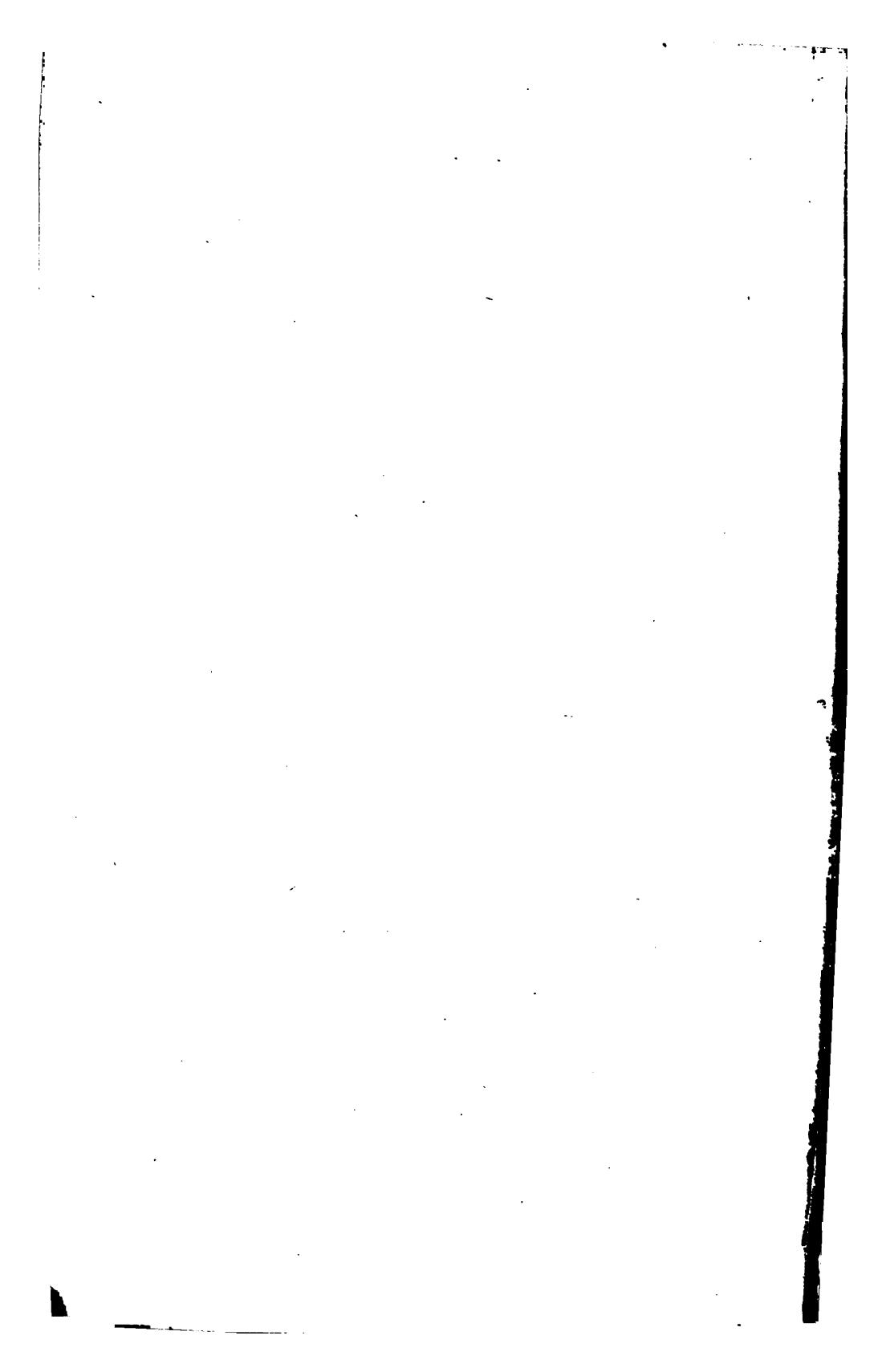
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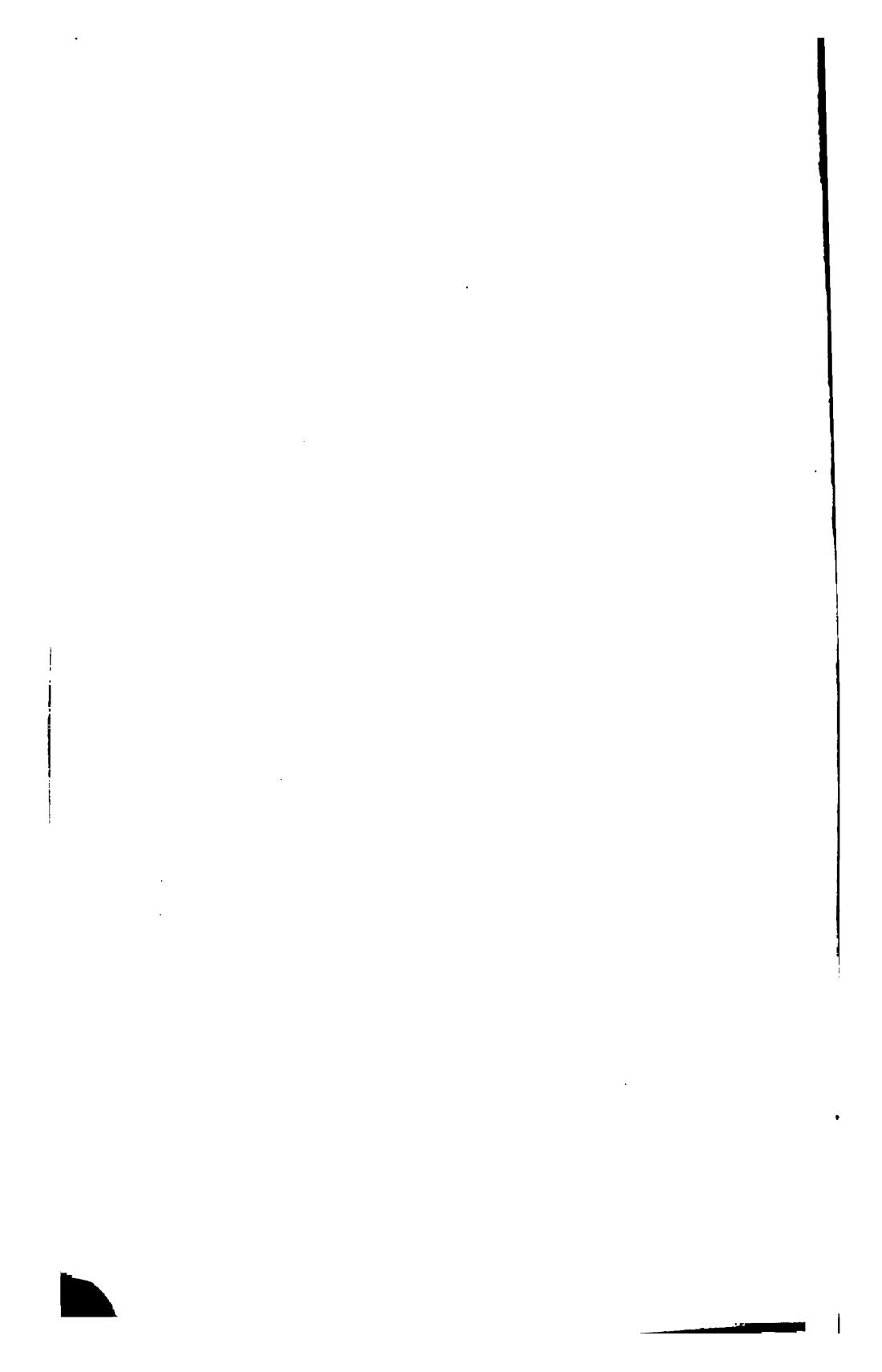
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The Midland



VOLUME FIVE

**MOORHEAD, MINNESOTA
AND GLENNIE, MICHIGAN
1919**

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The Midland

A MAGAZINE OF
THE MIDDLE WEST

JANUARY-FEBRUARY, 1919

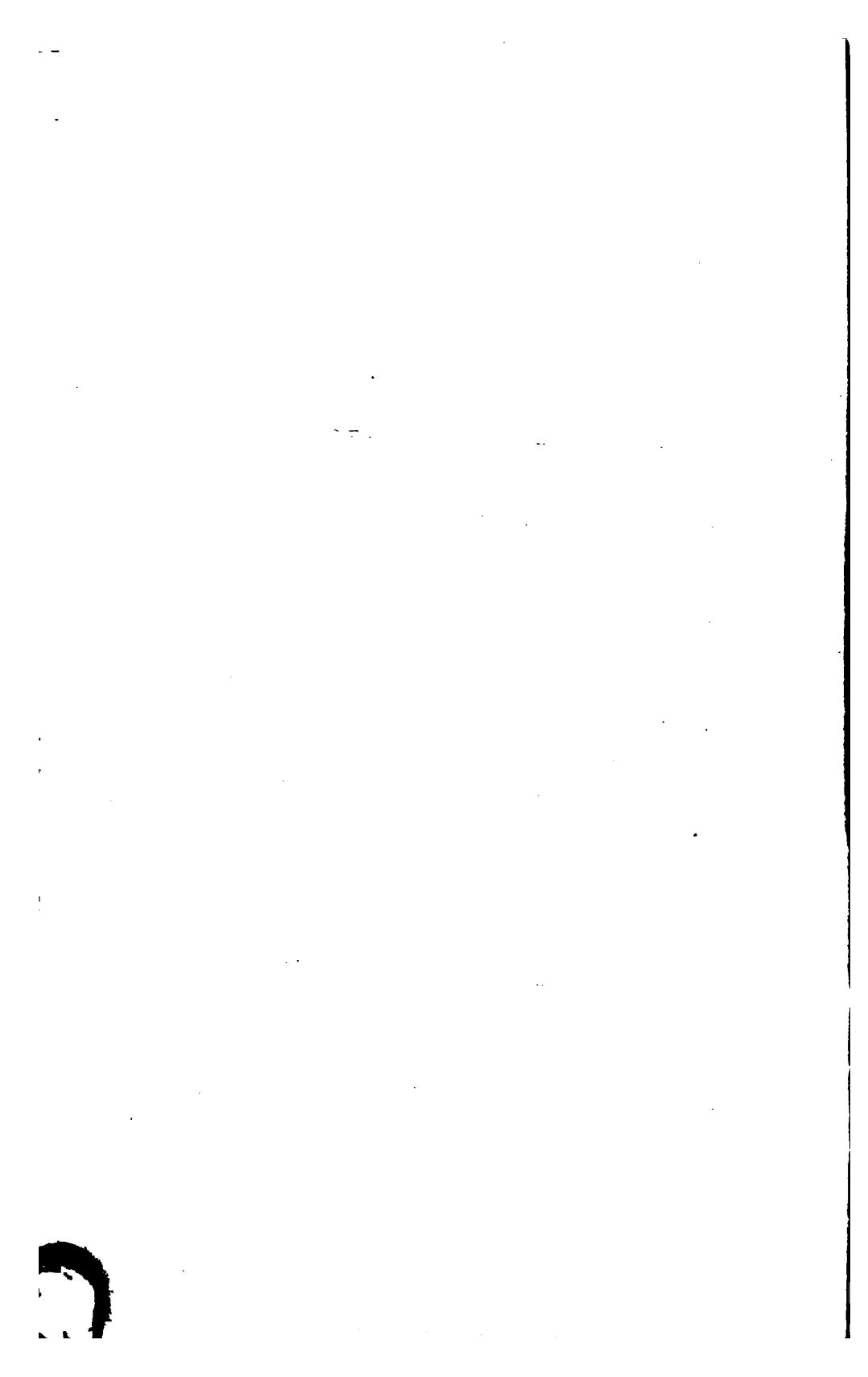
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The Midland

A MAGAZINE OF THE MIDDLE WEST

VOL. V

JANUARY—FEBRUARY 1919

NOS. 1-2

Editorial

In the death of Raymond H. Durboraw, November third, 1918, THE MIDLAND lost one of its most loyal friends. He could be called a founder of the magazine in the truest sense, for he was one of the group of four young men whose association at the State University of Iowa in 1910-11 may be said to mark the inception of THE MIDLAND idea. When the actual plans for the magazine were in process of development, in the summer and fall of 1914, Mr. Durboraw's enthusiastic belief in the project, his steadiness and clearness of vision, were of service which it would be hard to over-estimate. He was one of the most active of the associate editors during the crucial first year of the magazine's existence. His fidelity in sharing the burdens of that year, and his hopefulness in the face of discouragements, were alike unfailing. The circumstances of the next two years prevented his assumption of an active part in the magazine's development; but the knowledge of his steadfast interest was always a real encouragement, and his judgment was appealed to on all important matters of policy. In the last year of his

life the magazine again had the advantage of his active participation as an editor. The fourth volume shows the influence of his taste in the choice of material, and gives testimony to his painstaking care in the make-up and proof-reading.

The expression of his friendship was frank, consistent, forgetful of self. He gave himself to high causes, and he knew no ignoble fears.

“The readiness is all.”

Come Back

By ALBERT EDMUND TROMBLY

I pass a window opening on the street
Where someone plays a melancholy song.
Have I not heard that wail and known it long?
Or why the faltering of my eager feet?
The present day and present hour retreat
Before the host of Yesterdays that throng
Out of a Past, whose pulses beat so strong,
That it must rise again and we must meet.

What song is this at which the dead years start?
What bitter-sweet memorial of a heart
To dreams long shattered by Life's stony track?
What ghost of all the Springs that seemed so fair—
Lost youth, lost love,—what voice of vain despair
That vainly calls: “Come back! come back! come
back!”?



The White Wake

By EDNA TUCKER MUTH

It was nearly midnight, and Beth, wrapped in her blue bathrobe, was writing to Lieutenant Herbert L. Peyton, Company E, —th Battalion, —th Engineers. She had pulled a rug over the crack under the door, that her father might not see the light, and upon a square of white paper, edged with pink, was scratching: "I came by our spring today, Herb. It is all frozen over. There are icicles on the cup. I remembered that day, when we—" She heard the front door close softly, and her father's careful foot on the stair. A moment she held her pen poised, for he had sharp ears. The Sanders' children went early to bed. Father wouldn't like it a bit her sitting up to write a letter. He went into his room, and scratch—scratch, Beth wrote of a day to come, when they could go down to the spring together, the icicles melted, the war at an end.

Suddenly she heard her mother's voice rise high and shrill, her father's answering, brusque and sharp. They were almost always quiet, when her father came in late. They paused abruptly. They had heard something. Not from Beth's room, but from Toby's across the hall.

"Mother," he was shrieking, "make Beth go to bed. There's a light coming through the keyhole!" She had forgotten the keyhole. The door of her mother's room opened sharply.

"Beth, aren't you in bed? You need all the rest you can get. You've a hard day before you."

Beth threw her pen away, pushed her chair back to the bureau, scraping the polished boards, pulled the rug from the door, muttering to herself: "Nineteen years old, engaged to be married, and can't sit up an extra hour. 'Tomorrow — hard day' — pick out yarn for striped socks. Herb hates fussy things."

She awoke once, in the night, and thought that she heard her father at the telephone. She lay awake for some time, and the injustice of being sent to bed prompted the thought that in this hour lost from sleep she might have finished the letter.

They were eating breakfast, when a boy came by crying the extra. Toby jumped up, but his father stopped him.

"Sit down! Sit down and eat your breakfast! Those extras take away my appetite."

Toby subsided.

"Where's the morning paper?" asked Beth.

"Why, where is it?" her mother asked innocently. Her father made no reply. He was eating very fast, with his eyes upon his plate. Toby watched him for a minute, and then he too began to eat fast. He was seldom allowed that privilege. Presently, he began to clatter his spoon, and that going without reprimand, he tipped his bowl and sent his tongue ranging about for the last drop of cream.

"Toby!" cried Beth. "Mother, do you see what that child's doing?"

She had not seen. Now, as they all frowned upon Toby's activities, he lifted his round china-blue eyes above the rim of his bowl, and called out: "Why, there's the paper, on the hall-rack. It's slipping over behind. I can pretty near see it upside down." He released his bowl to read: "U. S. Transport Sunk by —"

"Now, Beth —" her mother began, but Beth could not be stayed. She snatched at the paper.

"Tuscania —th Engineers — daddy, look — mother — oh — Herb must have been on that boat —"

Her father pushed back from the table and went into the hall. Her mother put an arm about Beth and spoke sternly.

"Now, control yourself! There are always distorted accounts. Nearly all the men were taken off by other boats. The lists will be in soon. Sh—Don't make a fuss, before daddy and Toby! Soldiers risk their lives every day —"

Her father came in from the hall. He was dressed for the ride to town.

"Father, isn't there some way — something —"

"I'll telephone if any word comes. Mother, a board meeting on tonight. We may make a dinner of it. Don't sit up!" He was going. He wasn't making anything of the sinking of the transport. He didn't seem to realize. Once, on the screen, Beth had seen a periscope cutting across the water — the white wake of it — she began to moan.

"Now, now," said her father casually, "don't make a fuss till we know about it. I thought last

night that there wasn't a bit of truth in the flash. They get wild — ”

“ You knew it last night? ”

“ I heard something, but didn't think much of the report. — So many rumors. I'll call up. I'm in an awful hurry. Going to take over the welding contract. Goodby, Betsy! Goodby, Beth! Toby, don't forget to sweep the back walk! ”

Her father was gone to a board meeting, just as though this were an ordinary day. He had been in a hurry and had thought of welding. He hadn't given a moment to the — to *it*, but he had taken time to tell Toby about the back walk. Beth remembered that awful picture of the periscope — the torpedo —

She heard her mother's voice calling to her.

“ Beth, stop — here, take my hand! Toby, run away! Now, behave yourself — behave yourself! ”

She sat up in cold wonder. They hadn't any of them any time. That was plain. They didn't want a scene. Very well! If his going meant nothing to them; if the wreck of her life was such a slight thing, she would not let them see how she was suffering. Her father might go to his board meeting, and her mother pick out yarn for stripes, and Toby — Toby was at the table lapping cream once more.

“ Where are you going, Beth? ”

“ I want to be alone — to think — ”

“ That's my brave girl! That's good! Herb is probably safe and sound, somewhere in Ireland. I wonder if we can — if we can go about ten? ”

“ Go! ”

"Yes, for that yarn. Mrs. Lowell likes the dark blue, but some of the other women —"

"I can't — I can't pick out yarn —"

"Why, yes, dear, you can. I don't see how I can get through without you. You promised to help and after you think things out a bit, you'll see how much better it will be to keep right on working while you wait. After all, there are hundreds and hundreds of our boys landing — maybe this very minute, Herb — Toby, stop — stop! Put down your father's bowl!"

As Beth entered her room, her eyes fell upon the unfinished letter; she remembered a day, when in giving Herb a cup of the spring water, she had said, "Now wish — anything in reason," and Herb had answered, "That I'll come back to you." He had been so straight and brown from his summer in the camp. Beth put her head down on the letter and cried softly. There came a loud knock at the door, followed by violent pounding.

"Let me in! Say, Beth, you let me in! I can get a pair for a quarter —"

"Go away!"

Where was Beth's mother? She asked herself the question, bitterly. Was no hour sacred to this family? She supposed she had better open the door. Toby's kicks were destructive.

"Beth, don't cry. I can get a pair from —"

"Tell me what you want and then go!"

"Jim Price will give me two for a quarter — white rats. I got five cents already. I like to see

their little pink eyes. You would too, Beth. Gee, Beth, they're awful cute. Once Jim trained one of his to hide behind the gem-pans in the pantry, on the shelf. His mother didn't find it out till — The rat lived there, you know. You know the time I carried your bag down to the station, when — Gee, they got pink eyes — Say, Beth, don't cry, Herb can swim like a fish."

"Ask mother for the money."

"She said maybe you —"

Beth found two dimes and gave them to Toby. After he had gone, she sat down upon the floor, beside her wicker glory box, and opening it ran her fingers over the monogram on a tablecloth. It belonged to her pansy set. Herb liked that the best of all. Beth put her head down on the pansies and began to cry again. Her mother called from the stair: "May I come in by your south window, to set up this sweater? It's so cold in the house today."

Yes, it was cold in that house. No one understood. It had been a long time since her father and mother had courted by the spring, and anyway their courtship had been different. There hadn't been any war.

She remembered, now, that her father had never made very much of her engagement. He had said only: "Well, old lady, so you're grown up, are you?" and had walked to the window. Her mother had been more demonstrative, but even she — she had been sorry that Herb was poor. Perhaps they hadn't cared to have her marry him, and now that he was gone — Beth grew colder and colder. They should never know how much she cared.

"Beth, will you do this purling for me? It seems as though I'll never learn to purl—"

"Mother, I—I can't knit today—"

"Some women hire their purling done and I'm sure I should too, if it weren't for you. Clara took hers out eighteen times. Beth, if you would only—"

Beth took the bulky ball, the amber needles. She counted and recounted. As she began to knit, her mother began to talk. She couldn't stand any more. She couldn't!

"Please, mother—"

"Bless the child, it's getting late and we've a lot to do. I'll hurry around and get into something. I'm so glad that you feel you can go with me—"

"No, no, mother, I didn't say—I can't—"

"I'm sure you will feel better for the outing."

Her mother was gone, almost before Beth realized that her excuse had not been accepted. She began to dress slowly. Her father had not telephoned. She knew that, in his place, she would have moved heaven and earth. She would have sent messages to Washington, and to England and—everywhere. She would have put off welding until she knew about Herb. It was dreadful, this waiting and being treated like the small girl of the family. They were ignoring her as though she and Herb didn't count. She must go on this way until the lists began to arrive, and even then—her father and mother would never understand. To them she was still a child. They would never take her seriously.

Half way to the car, her mother remembered that she had forgotten to tell her father about the Field

Orphan tickets. She left Beth and ran back, bumping the door as she entered, her hat bobbed to one side.

"Well?" Beth straightened her mother's hat.

"He didn't hear anything. Just as I thought, he had forgotten those tickets. Your father is so absent-minded. I wonder if I'm not that way too. Have you noticed that I don't concentrate as I used to?"

Beth's mother talked all the time. Beth longed for that minute in which she might think about Herb, but the minute never came. Instead, she must look at the silver trimming on a coat, or admire brown fur.

It was late in the afternoon when they reached home. Toby met them.

"Jim sold his yesterday. I guess with thirty cents, or maybe thirty-five — Jim thinks we can get some at Peak's. Peak's rats are higher priced. Their little pink eyes and their longy tails — Say, Beth, I bet you never saw such rats — What you looking at me that way for? Mother, make Beth stop looking at me like that. I didn't do anything."

"You might run right down to Peak's now, Toby, while sister and I rest. I'm willing to give you thirty-five cents if —" Toby ran down the street.

Mr. Sanders did not come home to dinner, neither did he telephone. After dinner, Beth's mother said: "I wonder if we couldn't have a little music?"

"Not tonight — please, not tonight, mother."

"Or a little game of cribbage. Cribbage is such a

pleasant game. And we'll build a fire in the fireplace and pop corn. Toby will build it, won't you, Toby? Oh, yes, dear — anything to help sister and mother."

Toby knelt by the andirons.

"Peak is all sold out. But I bet I know where I can find a whole slew of white rats —"

"Oh, white rats! White rats! As if anything like that matters, when Herb — mother, I'm going mad!"

"Hush, dear! You must think of someone beside yourself. Toby is only a little boy. He doesn't understand. Think about him and about — us." Her mother looked away. Beth grew very angry. Always she must think of someone else; her father and his welding, her mother and yarn, Toby and white rats. They didn't care. Very well, she would show them!

"I'm all right. I'll just sit here and think."

"But you'll hold a book, won't you, dear? Just hold it in your hands. You can think quite as well with a book before you, and you look better. You will hold it, won't you, dear?"

Her mother thrust a book into her hands. Presently, she began to flutter its leaves, catching a phrase here and there, then the gist of a page, then another. This was an odd situation. How did it all come out? As she began to read the black load shifted and at length fell away. When the clock pealed the Sanders' curfew, Beth was sleepy.

In the morning, as soon as she heard her father

stirring, Beth went to the door of his room. He did not reply to her first gentle appeal, and she rapped again smartly.

"Hello, there, old lady!"

"Didn't you hear — a bit of news?"

"Just general information as yet. Don't worry! There are at least eighteen hundred — Where's my tie, Betsy?"

"Father —"

Mr. Sanders came out and closed the door behind him.

"Look here, Beth, you've got to keep up. The lists will be along pretty soon. I was busy yesterday or —"

"Oh, daddy —"

"Hush! Don't let mother hear you. Beth, you've got to buck up. You've got to do it! Think what a brave kid you sent across, and for Heaven's sake, buck up! Think of all the chances, and stop! Stop! I tell you! Behave yourself!"

Beth's father shook her. He was plainly disgusted. Here was the fact again. No one understood. Very well. She wouldn't give way. She would show them.

They sat down at the table. Toby was flushed with success. He was once more on the track of white rats.

"Down across the river, there's a good place that don't charge high. They're cute. They have such —"

Oh, if the white rat season would ever close! Why did her father and mother talk incessantly?

"Today, I think we will go over the chests in the garret, Beth and I. Daddy, may we go over your college box? Those letters that your aunt wrote to your mother after her husband — after the Little Big Horn?"

"Mother, I can't regulate today — I can't —"

"Oh, yes, Beth. This is the very day for it. I've been waiting for a sunny day. We'll just drag out the trunks. I never let Clara touch a thing. Toby, if you would like to help —"

"I'm going down across the river for white rats. The biggest has a brown spot on his side. Jim and Peak have both seen it. Peak says —"

"Daddy, will you bring us home one of those big boxes of candy? The kind we used to buy Beth, when —"

"Oh, please, not candy. Mother, I can't regulate."

"You could go down across the river with me." The spring! On their way to the river, they would pass the spring. She would stop there and think about Herb.

"I could go across the river."

Toby's freckled face beamed.

"Brown as anything. Jim and Peak both say it. On his side —"

Once more Beth's father went tearing out for his coat.

"Goodby, Betsy! Goodby, old lady! Toby, don't forget the back walk!"

Beth wandered restlessly about the rooms. Her mother hadn't paid any attention to her expressed preference. She was preparing to regulate. Of old Beth had loved that college box, those brave letters from Wyoming, but today — why did they all insist on having her help today? This was her day to think and to mourn. They behaved as though it didn't matter. Very well. She would go on and regulate. She would eat candy, if her father was so cruel as to buy it. She would notice the brown spot on the rat. They should never know. But, at night — when they were all in bed, she would pull the rug across the crack under the door, and think, and think.

Sitting upon the garret floor, sorting the tintypes, Beth came upon the picture of her quaint little great-grandmother Allen, her ringlets and her coral pin, her thread lace collar, one shoulder poked up through the low neck of her challis-delaine.

"She — all these folks look so happy, mother. They didn't have any torpedoes in those days, did they?"

"There were Indians — and other things. Great-grandmother Allen found her husband dead in the field, an arrow through his heart, and herded her five little children twenty miles to the fort, living on nuts and berries and —"

"But this picture was taken afterwards, and she looks so pleasant."

"She had to keep right on working, I expect, and when she did get time to sit down and brood, after spinning and cooking, and sewing and nursing her

little ones and her neighbors, she was probably so tired that she just slept, and she grew happy again naturally."

Toby began to call from below. He was saying: "Say, Beth — Say, Beth —" and again monotonously, "Say, Beth —"

"Perhaps it's the telephone," she cried, and stumbled toward the stairs. Toby was in the hall. Beth brushed him aside. Her father was coming up the front walk. His face was working strangely. Two tears were finding their way to his bristling gray moustache. He held out his arms.

"It's all right! Herb's all right! He's on his way to Belfast. I've been sitting at the wire — My little girl! My baby! Cry all you want to, old lady. We'll all cry. Mother — Betsy, don't make such a fuss. I've got the cable in my pocket. Herb's all right!"

Beth's mother had settled down upon the stair weakly, her head against the newel post, her hand to her throat. Toby who had run from the hall at sight of his father's tears, now returned with a wire cage. It was packed with rats. This he thrust into Beth's hands, saying gruffly: "I'm sorry for Herb. You can have 'em."

"But, Buddy, Herb's all right. Daddy found out for me. He's in Ireland."

Toby looked from one to the other in stupefaction. Then he waved his hand carelessly.

"You can keep 'em anyway," he said. "I got 'em for you."

Two Poems

By MARTIN FEINSTEIN

"C'EST LA GUERRE"

Between my heart and yours lies No-Man's-Land,
Entrenched and evil-wired,
Where ragged trees shiver in the wind, and stand
Abashed and tired,
Where nothing beautiful is found,
And death is keeper of the ground.

Between our lives, O love, lie desolate years,
Ruined cities of France,
Where all the streets ring hollow, and one hears
The ghostly dance
Of doors and shutters swinging in the wind,
Gossiping tales of women who had sinned.

If I could only sow the waste again
With poppies and green grass and summer rain!

"APRES LA GUERRE"

After the grey days and the grey nights expire,
And the hearts of men
Turn to the sun, O my love, whatsoever your lips
will require
Will be good again.

Others will weigh in the balance the battles I fought,
For folly or loss,
But I shall not hear, O my heart, I shall see in your
eyes what I sought;
I have lifted my cross.

Such things will not matter, that death leaned close
to my shoulder,
And smiled in my face,
That darkness clung to my side, and grief, grown
wiser, older,
Whispered, "There is no grace,

"Only the grey days and the grey nights; it is better
so."—
But the hearts of men
Turn to the sun; O my love, what your lips will
require I know
Will be good again.

The Dead Poet

(IN MEMORY OF JOYCE KILMER)

By PAUL LYMAN BENJAMIN

The glen is still to-night,
There is no sound of voice or bird,
Nor any living thing has stirred
Within the mottled light
That bends — a wraith of elfin white —
Among the trees;
Nor any sight to see
Of flitting lanterns in the dell.
There is no whispering
Of little folk amid the leaves,
No pattering of tinkling feet
Within the grottoes of the dark;
No fairy bell
Pricks thro the dim, black wing
Where all the shadows brood;
No wood-notes sweet
Of dove or thrush or lark
Charm the still air.
There is a hushed quiet everywhere
As tho a symbol or a word
Had slipped along the byways of the wood,
And all the kinfolk of the wild
Had heard that he —
Borne upward on the wings of light —
Had said his last farewell,

No more to sing
Nor ever more to bring
To all the world the whimsies of a child.
And so they mourn for him
Throughout the pregnant silence of the night.

Nocturne

By CHARLOTTE BECKER

The chimneys watch and whisper,
The street-lamps blink and glow,
The pavements stare and glisten —
Dear God, how much they know.

Within the square, where shadows
In long gray fringes lie,
The fountain, chill and silent,
Reflects the leaden sky.

Grim, like the muffled echo
Of war's retreating heels,
The dull, insistent rumble
Of distant thunder peals.

And, pacing cold and hopeless
The watches of the night,
A ragged beggar curses
The windows warm with light.

Knowing Dad

By IVAL MCPREAK

Dad and I have often been taken for brothers. I think it's because we have always had more of a man-to-man understanding than father and son usually do. We began to know each other in my earliest boyhood; and later, when we "bached it" together in a very empty, weatherbeaten farmhouse, there was perfected between us a comradeship that came out of sharing a great loneliness.

Many things helped me to know Dad, chief among them the incident by the window,—an episode which for the space of a few years was only a mystery insubstantially woven of detached words, silences, and apprehensive feelings. Hence, in the telling of those things that set forth the greater mystery of Dad himself, there comes insistently the feeling of a hot summer afternoon, and the sensation of lying on a red plush couch in front of the window and being shielded from the sun by the green curtain pulled down. The images of faces and gestures are clear, but the talk is fragmentary, just as it was the first time, before I was prepared to hear it all.

In the beginning, however, I believe it was the incident of the dark wood that made me see, after a childish fashion, into the mind of Dad, at least to sense a more than surface difference between him and Mother. I remember looking down a narrow

road that branched off from the highway at the corner of our dooryard and noticing a thick wood that seemed to stretch away into mysterious distances. And straightway I became afraid of that wood as something that should not be passed by at night. It was a dark mass of trees, unlike the friendly Corot shades of the grove in our yard. A neighbor boy shortly afterwards told me that the devil came up out of that wood to catch and devour boys, whether they were good or bad. I ran into the house to ask Mother if the devil lived down there. She was painting trees with a brush on a piece of canvas. But she laid down her brush, took me in her lap, and talked a good while in words which I didn't understand, but from which I gathered that being good would insure me against harm from Satan, no matter how near he was. Then I got down and watched her paint. A few minutes later Dad came in. As I remember it now, he seemed to look on with an uncomprehending approval until, taking notice of me, he found words for praise. He lifted me up, pointed at the canvas, and said something in which I caught the words, "Mamma—pretty picture." That night, when the fear of the devil and the wood possessed me again, I asked Dad about it out by the barn. I think he was a bit puzzled for a moment at my question; then with a touch of gruffness he said, "No, there ain't any devil in those woods." Presently, in a matter-of-fact voice, he added, "That piece of timber belongs to Mr. Brundage." That was the first time I had heard the name, but it stayed by me always. Mr. Brundage, unluckily identified with the devil, was a person to be feared.

Then, there are other memories that stand out curiously clear in vague settings: Mother sewing and painting incessantly before Christmas; Dad glancing up at the ill-fitting stovepipe of the many elbows and remarking that "Santa Claus would have a hard time coming down *that*;" Grandma Stillwell visiting us, always with something for me, and afterwards Mother and Dad trying to explain why she never came any more. Mother told me she had gone to heaven, and went on to describe what sort of place that was; but Dad, uninstructed, said that she was dead. Then, I suppose, they got together on their stories, for I was comforted by Dad's promise that "we would all see Grandma Stillwell some day."

One spring morning I was made to realize that I was six years old, nearly seven, and must go to school. At the breakfast table Mother commanded me to go straight to school, to come straight home, to keep my face and hands clean, and to get my lessons. To all of which Dad added the sweeping admonition, "And mind what the teacher says!" "Teacher" turned out to be a big-framed man with a sonorous voice, who waved his blackboard pointer furiously when we sang *Columbia, the Gem of the Ocean*. And in me there was a feeling of resentment at having to obey this alien person thrust upon me. I began to look upon Dad with a new sort of affection that set him out sharply from among men. He was the one to whom I was glad to get back at the end of the day's work, the one whom it was becoming a privilege to obey.

In another sense, I imagine that I was more intimate with Mother during these times. It is hard to tell about that; her personality has become dim through the years. But without doubt I took more pride in associating with Dad and doing the things that met with his approval, some of the same pride I had in holding my own with the boys in playing "ball" or making good use of my fists in turbulent walks home from school. On the occasion of one of these frays I scented a smothered disagreement between Mother and Dad. She told me it was wrong to fight and almost made me feel ashamed of myself. Dad kept quiet while she was talking, then added that "this had to be stopped." But even a seven-year-old may sometimes plumb the sincerity of parental disapproval. A week or so later I slipped out to the field where Dad was working. With nose bleeding, I maintained that "I had to do it!" He looked a bit stern, but didn't say much until we were back in the house, and then he said it to Mother. Of course, he gave me a conventional scolding, wherein he was vigorously abetted by her. They did agree, however, that I shouldn't draw pictures in school in place of studying.

Eventually came the "last day" with the packing home of book and slate, and the freedom of the summer vacation. There were more ball games, visits to the swimming hole, barefoot marathons across pastures and up dusty roads, and one day of miracle and romance at the circus in Mound City. I remember, too, of following Dad when he was plowing corn,

— of digging toes into the cool of freshly furrowed earth and delighting in the shimmer and ripple of a field of young corn. On rainy days I often stayed indoors drawing, taking especial pleasure in this when Mother would be working on one of her paintings. Yet, I imagine Mother regarded the making of pictures merely as a nice accomplishment with which one might employ leisure hours. I know it was many years before I looked upon my own efforts as having to do with the serious business of life. To Dad, perhaps, it was all a matter beyond him and hence one with which he should not concern himself. Even when I was able to point out a press notice of one of my pictures at a club exhibit, his most considerable comment was a remark to a neighbor afterwards that I "took after Laura." Dad had little to say regarding many things that vitally touched me. In me he was interested, and through me my work received a silent recognition.

During this first vacation Aunt Rhoda — substantial Aunt Rhoda — descended upon us from a place known as Colorado. She was a large woman, capable and officious. Her husband came along and stayed for two or three days. He was also substantial, but with a stingy compactness of physique, with no waste of bone. He talked to Dad in short unintelligible sentences, but otherwise seemed to move about in a self-made background. He did, however, give me a nickel, bidding me put it into a bank. Aunt Rhoda oppressed me with vehement talk about minding Papa and Mamma and growing up to be a

fine young man, but I soon began to take note that Dad and Mother were also victims. Dad smiled tolerantly and whisked off swarms of words with noncommittal rejoinders. I felt a satisfaction that he appeared to take her no more seriously than I did, but, of course, I understood little of what was being talked about. I didn't know Dad yet, nor Aunt Rhoda, for that matter.

Some awareness of the situation was brought to me one day when Mother had to quit arguing with Aunt Rhoda on account of a long spell of coughing. And immediately I realized I had heard that cough many times before. I had grown accustomed to it, no doubt. Aunt Rhoda said something then about "consumption" and evidently it had to do with that cough. An uneasiness too vague for the relief of a question took possession of me.

One evening, after Aunt Rhoda had become an institution around home, I fell down our steep, narrow stairs, rolled all the way to the bottom, landing with a most painful bump. She ran and picked me up; Mother followed, crying out with almost a scream, "Why, Elwin!" and between the two I was diagnosed and comforted. Dad entered the room, looking about as nearly scared as I have ever seen him, but in a steady voice he called out to me, "Hurt ye much?" There was a quality in Dad's voice that threw out a challenge to hardihood, and I managed to gasp, "No, not much." And years afterwards, in Dad's very silence I have felt something like this same challenge going out to me, a quiet expectancy

of things to be accomplished, a looking forward to a success, denied to him, to be achieved by me.

Well, Aunt Rhoda left soon after. Then followed days when Mother's cough forced itself upon my attention. Sometimes she would take a nap at odd hours of the day, and this made me curious. A persistent picture of those days is Dad and Mother at mealtimes, sitting at the table, looking at each other in a strained fashion, and saying things at long intervals. Once or twice I caught the name of Brundage, the owner of the dark wood, and he seemed to be connected with a forbidding affair known as "mortgage." And from time to time a man with a tiny spade of gray beard called in. That was Doctor Lain, and he left uncomfortable silences behind him.

It was on a day after one of his visits that I began to have the pain of the falling downstairs all over again, and when Doctor Lain came the next time, he told me to go to bed. It appeared that my fall had bred mischief in the form of an evil hip disease. He talked a great deal to Dad and Mother whenever he called; there was much said about "operation" and "Chicago", words of vague but tremendous import. But always Dr. Lain insisted rigorously on my keeping very quiet.

Then neighbors swarmed in — I never knew we had so many neighbors — and women said soft, meaningless things over me. I confess that at first I was guilty of a pleasurable feeling in receiving all this attention; there was a dignity in being sick.

But soon the visits grew irritating. This invasion of outside persons drew me in those days a little closer to Dad and Mother, to Dad especially,—Dad, who could never walk across the floor cautiously enough to suit Mother, but who brought with him the health and vigor of the out-of-doors whenever he came and sat down beside me. I spent most of my time in the front room. Here on long afternoons Mother would do her mending and sewing—she hadn't painted lately—and I would lie or sit propped up on a red plush couch, that had been placed in front of a window facing the road. To get away from the insistent torture of my pain, I gazed out at teams passing by, looked at books with plenty of pictures in them, or drew with the colored pencils Dad had bought me.

One afternoon, during an interval of ease when I thought I was getting better, I fell asleep, and as usual Mother pulled down the green curtain to keep out the sun. I heard the rattle of it just as I was dozing off. But it was too hot for sleeping soundly. Half-awake, I opened my eyes, feeling all through me the oppressive languor of a sultry midsummer. But with this sensation I had an uneasy alertness that something out of the ordinary was going on.

Dad and Mother were standing by my couch and talking. It was unusual for Dad to come into the house in the middle of the afternoon; on sunshiny days he was out in the fields working. Somehow I was sure they were talking about me. Strangely detached came the words:

“That can wait!”

It was Mother who spoke them. She apparently said this with great effort, and the words seemed to be suspended in the air as if urging attention. The silence that followed might have lasted for seconds or for uncounted hours. Then Dad shook his head in some sort of voiceless denial, but Mother went a little closer to him and called "Andrew!" as though she were trying to waken him from sleep, and the rest of her words were forgotten in the immensity of the stillness that closed in upon them. Finally Dad said something in a choked voice; I heard "get ready to go," and as he turned to leave the room, he named the name of Brundage. The dread dream quality of that name is not gone from me yet, years after old man Brundage is dead and buried.

After Dad had gone out, Mother sat down and looked at me a long time without appearing to know that I was fully awake by this time. I started to ask, "What's the matter?" That roused her; she bent over me and drew me to her desperately.

Many times in the months that followed did this incident by the window come to me, insisting on interpretation. Portentous as it was in its words and silences, even in its vagueness, I have often wondered that it should have haunted so persistently the mind of a seven-year-old. Of course, there were unusual elements in it: Dad coming into the front room in the middle of the afternoon, the hint of secrecy in being talked about when I was supposed to be asleep, and the suggestion of a journey, prob-

ably unpleasant, since it had to do with Brundage. But another thing undoubtedly added to its importance: a morning or two later the promise of a journey was fulfilled. Dad drove Mother and me to the railroad station, and I had my first ride on the cars. It was a long ride that ended in an infinite jumble of noises and high walls of brick,—quite different from the Chicago I had built up on the way. Then there were sickening fumes of ether, sweaty bandages, puttering doctors, and the longest days of my life lying in one of the many beds in a white-walled room. And through it all, the face of Mother, pale, anxious, reassuring.

We got back home in the fall, and sometime in the winter I began to take short steps and found myself walking. And by then Mother was in bed most of the time. Dr. Lain became a regular visitor and left bottle after bottle of medicine. Dad hired a girl to do the housework and take care of Mother. But I started to enter the kitchen one day just after she had done scrubbing. In defense of a newly spotless floor, she shrieked "Git out!" at me and waved the mop threateningly. Well, at that instant Dad stepped through the door and handed her some money, whereat she flew upstairs and left within the hour. I did not find out exactly what had happened until the next day, and for a good while afterwards I had a particularly warm feeling for Dad, with a bit of pride thrown in. A distant cousin of the family helped us for a week or so, and she charmed me with wonderful stories. But finally Aunt Rhoda came,

and the cousin departed. Aunt Rhoda was thinner now, yet capable and aggressive as ever. In some way, in a way that was strange for her, she gave me to understand that Mother was not expected to live.

Spring arrived with its rains and muddy roads, but it was not thought safe yet for me to go to school, so I was allowed to stay at home. And, just as I had become used to the cough before, so now, Mother in bed, Aunt Rhoda busying herself about the house, and Dad and I sleeping together upstairs, seemed the accepted and permanent order of things, in spite of Aunt Rhoda's disquieting prophecy. And meanwhile neighbor women talked softly with Mother in the bed-room and let their voices out with Aunt Rhoda in the kitchen.

On sunshiny days I took to going with Dad in the fields the last hour before he would quit work. An immense comfort there was in this companionship of the open field, in the riding or walking together, talking a little, but learning one another rather in long silences. I came to regard him as belonging wholly to me: no commanding relative bade me run on while she took him in charge. I was beginning to feel a new kinship to Dad.

Finally on an April morning when I awoke, Dad told me that Mother was dead. I do not remember just what I felt for a while afterwards. But I do know that before we went downstairs I suddenly became more conscious of our comradeship: Dad and I would stick together now, for sure.

Relatives poured in, relatives who have never seen each other since. Unknown female relatives

took me up and said, "And this is Laura's boy!" Then the minister—the funeral. . . . Why couldn't folks go away and leave one alone with the companionships that remained? And Dad, beset with sorrowful talk and important whisperings, was all the time somehow shoved into the background. How I resented his being so wholly taken in hand by softly treading strangers!

After the drive home from the cemetery, Uncle Mark, who had come for the funeral, Mrs. Wilson, our nearest neighbor, and Aunt Rhoda, were still with us. Mrs. Wilson stayed to help put the house to rights, and committed the sacrilege of wearing Mother's brown "mother hubbard." Aunt Rhoda talked strenuously to Dad; I knew they were discussing what was to be done with me. I heard her say, "Laura always meant for me to take Elwin." I didn't want to go with her: twenty-two miles over a country road was far from home. But Dad got me off by saying that it was only for a visit, that Aunty would take good care of me, and that he would come to see me once in a while. Dimly sensing the paradox in his assurance, I rode away with Aunt Rhoda and Uncle Mark in their carriage. I looked back at Dad standing by the gate as long as I could. . . . That night at Aunt Rhoda's I cried myself into a dream-ridden sleep. The room was full of people, and I was looking for Dad among them. . . .

I suppose that, with the selfish grief of a child, I felt only my own lonesomeness in those days, but I have often since contemplated the drab heroism of

him who lived alone in our empty, gray house. Usually I think of him doing the chores in the evening, looking for a light in the kitchen, then going in and cooking his supper,—doing that dreary task of cooking and eating his own meal alone. It is perhaps only a fancy of mine that on windy autumn nights he delayed going inside, so that he might put off hearing the rattling of doors and windows, the howling and whistling of the wind around the house and down the chimney.

On such nights I dreamed, but the dreams went back to the episode by the window. I watched them again, and feared for a terrible word that Dad would speak, at which Mother would grow deathly pale and then black in the face. Sometimes nothing would be clear except the drowsy feeling, the summer heat, the pulling down of the curtain, and an indefinite sense of tragedy. At other times there would be a wild cry of "Brundage! Brundage!" and a shapeless devil would rush in, and I would be awake with the fear of what was going to happen next. I do not remember any well-defined dreams about Mother save those connected with the window incident; so the incident itself began to take on the semblance of a dream. Possibly that is why I never plucked up enough courage to ask anyone about it.

Well, life at Aunt Rhoda's was not to my liking. They lived on an enormous farm; never did our little piece of ground seem so small. I learned later that Uncle Mark had acquired the place by a lucky gamble in real estate about the time of my falling

downstairs. They had two overgrown daughters who were vigorous with me in their sisterly solicitude. Clarissa and Emma they were called, and I have never liked those names since.

But I endured three years of living there and chafing under the sisters' surveillance around the house and at the district school. And meanwhile Aunt Rhoda was on the way to working herself to death, working indoors and outdoors, and could not give much time to me. Uncle Mark kept on moving in his self-made background and talking gruffly and unintelligibly to persons who worked for him. But there were rare occasions, almost too good to be enjoyed, when Dad came to see me or let me go home with him for a day or so. At Christmas once he stayed for three or four days; yet when he did go away, I felt as if he had left me shut up in a luxurious prison.

Suddenly, one Sunday forenoon — it was in the late summer — he drove up to the front gate without unhitching, and told Aunt Rhoda that he was going to take me away for good. She protested in emphatic tones, but to no avail. She was long getting my things ready. Her husband smoked on the back porch, whither he had betaken himself after greeting Dad indifferently. I learned afterwards of how Uncle Mark had complained that I took too much of Aunt Rhoda's time. That settled it. I went back home with Dad.

And what a joyous content there was in this homecoming! — in the noting of the familiar turns in the

last few miles of road; the looking out from the top of a rise for the hilly acres, the grove, and the gray house of our farm; the driving into the barnyard as dusk was coming on!

Then years of rare comradeship began. This life of "baching it", this getting on together in man-to-man fashion had something peculiarly wholesome about it. I helped Dad do the chores and cook the meals, and in the evenings we would play checkers, or he would read to me out of one of Mother's books. When school began in September, he would sometimes help me with my lessons; together we would puzzle over problems in fractions and hard words in McGuffey's Fourth Reader. Then on Saturday nights we went to town — to Mound City — where he often spent on me what must have been to him a big sum. I remember one night, after he had bought me a new suit, as well as some school books and a set of water color paints, he spread out on his hand a few remaining coins and remarked, "Well, I've spent a lot of money, but — I'm glad I've got a boy to spend it on."

There were hardships, of course, in this sort of life, prosaic, unromantic hardships. It was hard for me some winter afternoons to come home from school before Dad had got back from hauling wood, and to freeze over the building of a fire, — and it took a rousing fire to heat that house. But the return of Dad on such nights was all the more welcome. On the whole, these days are pleasant to think upon.

Mrs. Wilson dropped in once in a while to go through the house with a thorough sweeping and scrubbing and to put everything into housewifely order. But the furniture and the rugs and the pictures on the wall were left as they had been. Even the red plush couch remained by the front window. It had never been moved back to its old position in a corner of the room. Looking at it sometimes, especially on a summer afternoon, I thought of the enigmatic dialogue that had taken place when I was supposed to be asleep. Twice I dreamed that things might all have been different if only the right words had been spoken, if I, indeed, had said certain words that would have set matters right. But after a time I ceased to dream about the incident, and it lost its immediate haunting quality.

Only once did anything threaten the perfection of our comradeship. One night in town I was waiting for Dad on the sidewalk in front of the livery stable where our team was kept. Looking up the street, I saw him walking along with a woman whom I had never seen before, who could possibly be no relative of ours. Somehow I had a sense of being left out of a confidence, a feeling that an outsider was coming between us. But, at most, this amounted to nothing more than a premonition, until rumor put it on the tongues of my schoolmates that Dad was going to marry "that Mrs. Churchill." Then I could not help talking to Dad about it one night. At first, I was sorry for having done so; his face kindled with a strange displeasure and sternness. But presently

this was gone; he gazed for a while at nothing in particular, and he appeared to be thinking hard. Then he put his hands on my shoulders and said to me man-to-man-like, "No, I guess you and me can run the place alone."

The passing of this crisis led me to notice that other fathers and sons did not get along as we did, and I took a new pride in my peculiar relationship with Dad. And in this pride, I am sure, there was a bit of unselfish devotion. The healthy selfishness of the boy predominated, to be sure, yet there must have been with me the beginnings of a grown-up's understanding of parental work and worry.

In fact, I grew into a sort of maturity in those four years with Dad; earlier than most boys, I felt responsibility. This was due, in part, to the natural, yet unspoken, desire of Dad's that I should attain more success in the world than had been his portion. Accordingly, I became more studious at school as time went on, and delved into encyclopedias for the technique and the shop talk of half the known callings. I became known as being entirely too serious for one so young. And an odd hour with the pencil or watercolors was simply good fun, like a sleighing party or a fishing trip up the river, and had nothing to do with my sober looking forward into the future.

It was undoubtedly this desire to make a way for myself that persuaded me to go to Chicago with Aunt Rhoda when she came for me the second time. Her husband had died, the farm had been sold, Clarissa and Emma were safely married out West,

and Aunt Rhoda was left with income and leisure. Having friends in Chicago, she was determined to taste of city life. She begged me to come live with her and promised to put me through school.

It was not so hard leaving Dad this time: adventure lay ahead of me, and the chance of accomplishing things for the sake of both of us. Only after he had driven us to the station and someone shouted "All aboard!" did I feel a moment of regretfulness. Then, for a while after the train had pulled out of the depot, I hardly listened to what Aunt Rhoda was saying. For, in an onrush of memories, I was thinking of the trip taken seven years ago with Mother and of the incident that had been so mysteriously associated with my first going to Chicago,—the scene of words and silences by the window. In the remembering of it this time, there was the quick heart-beating of one who is on the threshold of a revelation: something would open up to me if I could but put together rightly all the words and gestures and feelings. Presently it occurred to me that Aunt Rhoda might help me. But even as I was on the point of framing a question to ask her, the incident had curiously been dissolved into a vagueness and unimportance that would make my question sound absurd to solid, practical Aunt Rhoda. Back in the light-of-day realities, I was peering out the window to see what sort of town we were passing through.

And Chicago,—so little did I remember from my former visit that I was really viewing the city for the first time,—Chicago had me staring open-eyed,

open-mouthed, at the wonder of it. For days I reveled in this stupendous carnival; but I got used to it soon enough, and it became just another work-a-day world, only bigger and more exhilarating than the old one.

Then followed six years of attending grammar and high school, of doing sketches for school papers and annuals, of forgetting that I had come to Chicago to find myself, of living completely and contentedly in the present. I went home for the greater part of the summer vacations,—how still and dull was everything on getting back that first summer! And Dad, patient old Dad, listened to the gossip of Chicago and to tales of inter-class feuds, while we were hoeing potatoes, and he was doing most of the work! Once during a winter, he came out to visit me; and mine was the prideful pleasure of showing him about the city — my city, so bewildering to him, so simple to me!

But toward the end of my last year in school I woke up to the fact that my drawing and painting had all the time yielded me the most satisfying hours. In the thinking on this and the obtaining of some expert criticism, I found a life work. That summer after graduation from high school, I did not go home; for, in my eager unrest, I had decided that I would not visit Dad again until I could face him with a promise of achievement, with a little of the wisdom and the craft that should come out of a year's study of art! So, I entered the Art Institute. There were dull days over cast drawing and per-

spective, but, on the whole, the work meant for me more abundant living, more doing with the vital and worthwhile things.

Late in the following spring Aunt Rhoda died suddenly. She had told me once of the contents of her will, so I was not surprised to find that I shared equally with the daughters, Clarissa and Emma. It was a modest portion, as fortunes go, but it insured me an income and enabled me to plan on putting new life into the farm at home.

After this, I grew more and more anxious to see Dad again: I had very much to tell him. But a bit of poster work, which I could not have very well refused, kept me from leaving Chicago until the latter part of June. And in the packing of my suit-case, the consulting of the time-table, and the buying of the ticket to Mound City, I had all the pleasure of preparing for a journey to picturesque and far-away places.

Out of the coolness of early morning I rode for hours through the midsummer glare of the open prairie. On arriving at Mound City shortly after twelve, I caught a ride out home with a neighbor who was in town for repairs on his corn plow. I intended to surprise Dad, and had not announced my coming. It had been only two years since I had ridden over this road, but it might have been twenty, so good was it to get back.

At the home place there was little changed. One of the Corot trees of the grove patterned huge, lace-like shadows on the house; the flat strip of country

to the southwest was blanketed in the green of Brundage's dark wood; and the stillness of mid-summer lay heavy on the land. I went into the house, and in the front room found the same rag carpet, the boldly figured cloth on the center-table, and the red plush couch in front of the window. A few of Mother's paintings hung on the wall. If only she could have been there! How we would have talked things over — how eager was I to show my new wisdom and craft!

I looked for Dad, but he was nowhere about the house or barn; he was, no doubt, plowing corn. I wanted to go out to the field, but I was dead tired from the lack of sleep and the wearisome ride: a reaction had set in, after the first keen excitement of homecoming. Besides, (this plan came to me brilliantly, like the thoughts just before dozing off) if I were going to surprise Dad, why not do it thoroughly? I would take a nap, then wash the dishes, which had been left on the table from noon, and get supper. Surely I had not lost the knack of frying eggs and potatoes and making tea. I would use the oil-stove: no smoke from the chimney would betray my presence to Dad.

I dropped on the couch by the front window. It sagged comfortably under me; the squeaking of the springs seemed all of a piece with the dream-like silence. The sunlight filling the room appeared to be forever fixed and motionless here, as if it were a very part of the walls and the carpet and the furniture. Then, in the midst of the luxurious stupor

that was stealing over me, I noticed that the green curtain of my window was rolled nearly to the top. I might be more comfortable if it were pulled down. But I was loth to disturb the half-doze into which I had fallen. Even the stuffiness of the room had a soporific potency, and it was easier to close the eyes. Presently, however, there seemed to be no need for me to make the effort. The curtain was being pulled down; I could hear the rattle of it. Mother always did that when she saw I was falling asleep.

But, after the first fatigue had passed away, I opened my eyes. It was too hot to sleep well, and I felt all through me the oppressive sultriness of mid-summer. Yet I had an uneasy alertness that something definite had wakened me, after all. I turned to look.

Mother and Dad were standing by my couch. They were talking, and immediately I realized that they had been talking for some time. And I had a curious feeling that I had been listening to them all the while, so that I understood the reason for what Mother was saying:

"But, Andrew, you know what Dr. Lain said. It has to be done right away, or else he can't—he'll be helpless!"

Mother was trying to look straight into Dad's face as she talked; but he stood with head bent over, seeing nothing. Without glancing up, he answered:

"And what's he been sayin' about your lungs. You've got to go—a change of climate in four months, he says, if you're ever going to get over it."

"He's exaggerating it, I tell you! I've been feeling lots better the last week or two. And just as soon as you can manage it, I'm going to take Elwin to Chicago."

Now Dad lifted his eyes to Mother.

"But you got to have—"

"That—that can wait!"

The words leaped up, commanding attention, challenging remembrance. . . .

Dad shook his head in some sort of voiceless denial, but Mother went up to him and laid her hands on his shoulders.

"Andrew!" She paused to subdue the unsteadiness in her voice. "You must—it's going to be done! You remember what he said about this being — fatal — sometimes?"

Then for unmeasured time, silence and the breathless waiting for what was to follow. And here it was that I felt certain words should be spoken. But even while trying to think of them, I remembered that this idea of words which should have made all things right had come from a dream.

Finally Dad spoke in a choked voice:

"All right, get ready to go. I'll see Brundage,— he'll take a second mortgage." He turned and left the room. . . .

A wave of the sultry midsummer swept down upon me. I stared at the ceiling, around the room, up at the green curtain rolled to the top of the window. By the measure of the shadows, the day had gone a little way toward its ending; but the stillness

of afternoon yet lay on the out-of-doors, and there was silence again in the room. Then, with a sensation of something breaking loose within me, I forgot the heat, the discomfort, the need of sleep.

It seemed as if here was a thing that I should always have known. There may be a psychic jargon for such experiences, but just then, this only was very clear: I had seen and heard again that which had happened before,—seen and heard when I was able to know and understand. And to take away a little of the bitterness and torment of what I had learned, I busied myself feverishly with plans,—how I would stay and work with Dad as long as I possibly could this summer, how we would use the money. Yes, plenty of money now, which might be put to some use,—paying off the remainder of the mortgages, building a new barn, buying . . . things.

Steps sounded in the kitchen. Dad had probably glimpsed me from a high point in the field, as I was riding down the road. He was coming in to see me. And the wisdom and the craft, the vaunted fripperies that are bought with a price, fell away; and I rose very humbly to take by the hand him whom I was beginning to know,—a little.

The Old Roman Road

By HOYT COOPER

England is a peaceful land, a land of long ago;
The stars that look on England watch her children
 come and go —
Saxon, Norman, Briton, the stars for them have
 glowed —
A thousand years from us they shone upon the
 Roman Road.

The English sun is high above the daisy dales and
 dells,
And Summer's on the land like the music of far
 bells, —
Poppies red among the wheat, — and ripe grass
 mowed,
Where the sound of ancient battles died along the
 Roman Road.

When Hadrian made a barrier at the ending of the
 world,
And the great name of Rome at the savage Picts
 was hurled,
The high gods of Latium found a new abode,
And Jupiter the Thunderer ruled the Roman Road.

The old Roman Road, the old Roman Road,
A way of wonder to the lad who would not stay at
home,
Who wearied of his villa in the soft Italian land,
And kissed his lady mother and faced northward out
of Rome.

Ah! life was young in Britain, and wander-gold was
there,
And glory to be gained with a love-rose in her hair —
But for young Patrician Pontius adventure was the
goad,
When he won to white Londinium and took the Ro-
man Road.

Up past Eboracum marched legions out of Gaul,
Through the heart of Britain, to guard the northern
wall —
Every town was brisk with trade as swinging by
they strode
Marching, marching, marching on the old Roman
Road.

Governors in purple, dancing girls in red,
Wanderers from all the world along this road were
led —
Thirsty troopers tramping with spear and shield for
load,
And campfires at night all along the Roman Road.

By the old Roman Road where the legions marched
along,
The ploughboy finds a rusty coin and sells it for a
song,
And where the flashing chariot creaked beneath its
load,
The gypsy tinker's cart jogs by along the Roman
Road.

Three Poems

By MARJORIE ALLEN SEIFFERT

THE RETURN

Moonlight and summer hills belong
To another land,—
Here every face is ashes, every song
Is emptier than the wind across the sand.

Here memory trails idle fingers
Across a grave,
An empty, grass-grown grave, where no ghost
lingers,
And not a withered rose is left to save.

Was this youth's one-time country? Never!
Framed in a dream
Only this much of youth is safe forever—
Moonlight, tall trees, and music down the stream.



CANDLES

Silence is but the golden frame
That holds your face;
My thoughts, like unblown candle-flame
In a holy place
Surround you. From this secret shrine
Somewhere apart
Can you not feel my candles shine
Upon your heart?

IF THIS IS YOUTH —

The old folk, looking back through years
Which turned them grey
Talk endlessly. I close my ears
To all they say,

Till they turn to their youth. With nodding head
And faltering tongue,
They speak in a dream when they have said:
“Then we were young!”

For me day follows weary day
And nights are cold,
If this be youth, what shall I say
When I am old!

Echoes

By CHANDLER TRIMBLE

I

"O-o-o, tchain! Mama. Tchain!"
"There, Sweet. Train will not hurt Sweetheart.
(— Where is he? O — there, with his men.
Heart's love! I cannot let him go.)
See daddy, Sweet?" (Lifting the little one.) "He's
coming.
Wave to daddy,— see?"
But the little one, whimpering piteously:
"*Mama! Tchain!*"

II

O little heart upleaned against his breast!
O girlish arms encircled round him sweet!
O little dreams, where will ye make your nest?
His life so dear — and Death so sure and fleet!
What will ye do when love's weak clasp is broken?
What shall ye hold when hopes no longer be?
How shall he tell thee, heart, his true love's token:
"*Love fareth where thine eyes are blind to see.*"

The Midland

A MAGAZINE OF
THE MIDDLE WEST

MARCH-APRIL, 1919

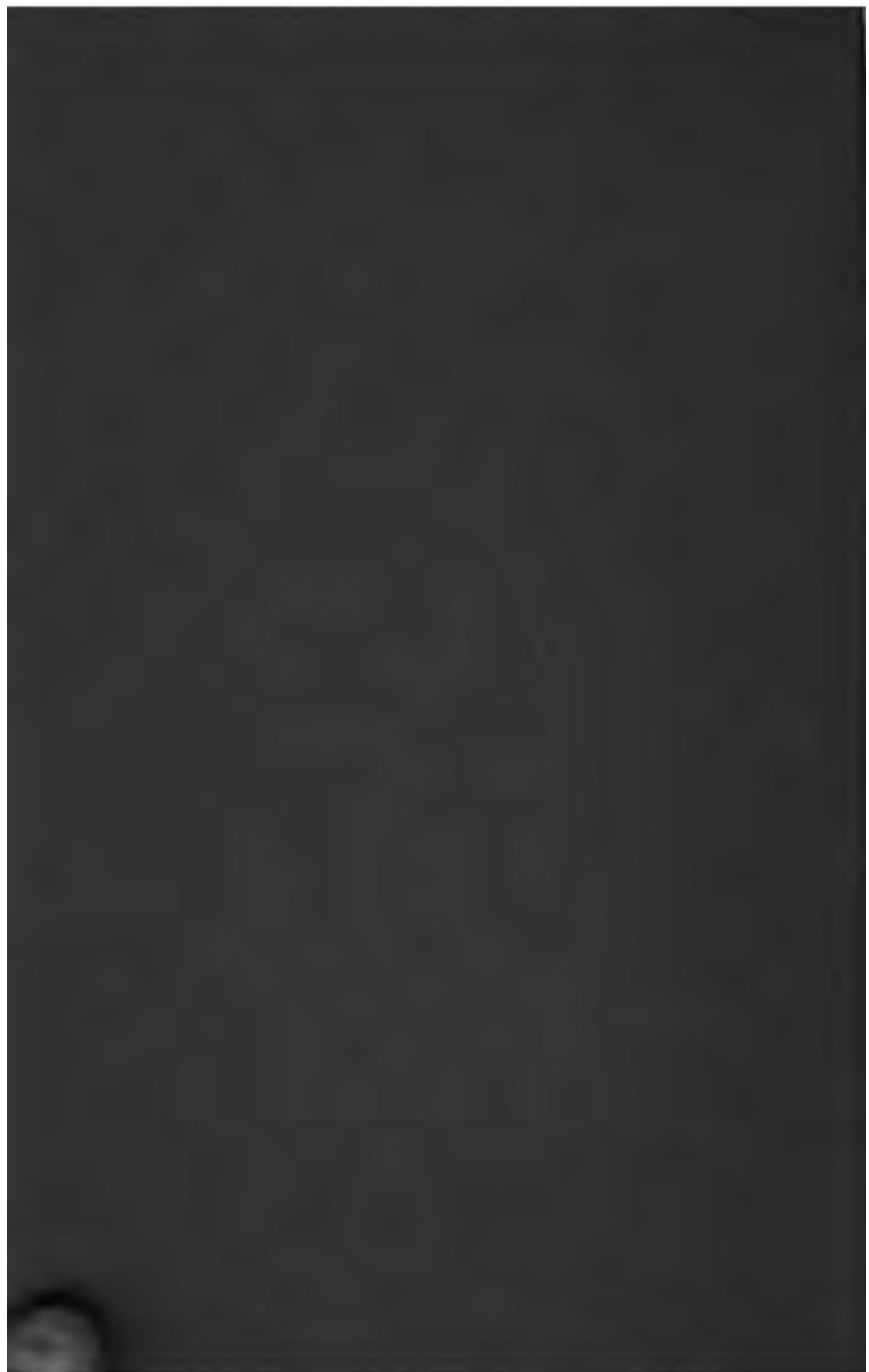
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The Midland

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The Adventurer

By DAVID MORTON

I have known beauty, but I had not known
Such stirring loveliness as yours could be;
Never Romance, for all her magic thrown
About the world, never the beckoning sea
Called to adventure as your still face calls,
Where hints and whispers speak and lure and dare
To storied cities and grey, ivied walls,
And undiscovered regions lying fair.

Your face is all the twilight of the earth:
I glimpse dim castles and half-open doors,
Wide rooms of tragic beauty, halls of mirth,
And dark seas beating on forgotten shores. . . .
Upon the threshold of these lands of Fate,
Now eager and adventurous, I wait.

When Comes That Hour

By JOHN RUSSELL McCARTHY

When comes that hour that is not mine, but Death's,
Bring me no books, my friends, to read me tales
Of prophets and of miracles. Nor let
The black-coat with his psalm-book enter in
Where Death and I are making friends at last.

Three things, or one of three, that God has made,
I would have with me in that solemn hour:

If I might have a flower from the field
To mind me of the beauty that is God,—
If I might have a dog to lick my hand,
Dumbly recalling faith in flesh and blood,—
If there might be a storm to tear the sky
And shout of power that endures forever,—

I would make friends with Death right cheerily.

For in that hour I would be near indeed
To God Almighty and His blessed dreams.

The School Teacher

By MARJORIE SUTHERLAND

"You never can tell about these quiet people," observed Dagobert Dow wistfully; "their hearts are hid away like the fire in a still mountain. Silent and tame maybe they have lived for years until they can't stand it any longer. Everything suppressed in them, restrained, bottled up — and then some little thing, no bigger than a spark, maybe, some little thing reaches the depths and they break forth. That was the way with Miss Nichols."

"Did you know her well?" I asked, for I had heard snatches of village moralising on the story of Ella Nichols.

"Knew her for twenty-one years. I reckon I knew her better than anyone else. Everyone was fearfully surprised of course. People are always surprised by earthquakes and volcanoes, and the queer thing is they are surprised even now. There are folks here in Roxbury who can't understand Ella Nichols to this day. But then years don't do some folks any good at all."

I was sitting under a birch tree with Dagobert Dow. When I came on a compulsory vacation to the middle-western village of Roxbury, I never expected to find a man like Dagobert Dow. In a country where there is nothing but corn, thousands of miles of corn that stretch out as far as the eye can reach like the miles of the sea, I expected that the people were as quiet and exemplary and as nearly alike as

the corn stalks. But I made a mistake. I found Dagobert Dow, gardener and general handyman for the village — a crockery man, I suppose one might say with the pharisee, but one who had rare if momentary insight into the bottomless depths of the human heart. I found him first on one of my walks. He was mowing grass in the cemetery, and because I was an idle passer-by carrying no respectable spade and wearing no husking gloves, he hailed me in a friendly fashion and began to talk about the crops. From that time on I indulged Dagobert's obvious curiosity and love of talk, and though he wearied me at times I was not sorry in the long run, because it all led to the birch tree and the story of the school teacher.

"How long ago did it happen?" I asked.

"About six, no seven years ago this October. A fine mellow fall just like this. I remember it particularly. The corn-stalks were bent over with their heavy ears; grapevines loaded; tomatoes red and luscious until frost. And the clearest nights — light and still with just a little breeze blowing to let you know 'twas earthly. I worked for old Mr. and Mrs. Nichols for a long time, and after they died and Miss Ella just kept on at the old place, I did the same chores. They always kept cows and had a little hay and corn. You've been past the place? Kind of gray old shack with those drooping old maples. Geraniums never would bloom in those urns, although Miss Ella had me set them out every year. They can't rent the house to anyone who

knows, and I reckon they never will. It has the look, the musty cave-of-a-look as the school teacher said herself after it began to get on her nerves. But, Lord, how much a person can stand before he really breaks. Why, she taught eighth grade in Roxbury for twenty years. Just think—twenty years of hammering sums into contrary young ones! I know what I'm talking about. I hustle for six. Every day rain or shine she would walk to town to the old school house, and everyone thought she would teach till she dropped, so steady, you know. Nothing ever stopped her. Her mother was an invalid and sat in a chair for years making little nick-nacks out of thread, but Miss Ella hired a Bohemian girl to stay with the old lady during school hours and kept right on teaching. After Mrs. Nichols died Miss Ella changed a little. Restless and maybe more thoughtful. She used to sit on the porch without any magazine or fancy work. Before that she was always making some kind of lace, but that summer I noticed she just sat still with her hands kind of lost, looking off to Jim Crosby's row of poplars. Poplars are so slim and ghostly in the distance, bowing all together as if they were obeying orders. At night I used to come by with the milk and say, 'Good evening, Miss Nichols,' commonplace-like, you know. I wanted to say, 'What are your thoughts, Miss Nichols?' for what people really think is as secret as the grave. Perhaps it's better so, but I think it would not be so hard to live if things were not so hidden."

"What did Miss Nichols look like?" I asked.

"Well," sighed Dagobert, "she wasn't much on looks. Forty-one, you know, and battering sums for twenty years. What could you expect? And she knew no way of deceiving the public. Some women know, but Miss Ella never had any time to learn, and never any reason, I guess. But she was neat-looking — maybe you know what I mean. But when she got the idea that somebody noticed her looks, the change was wonderful. She intended to shingle the barn that fall, but she bought two dresses instead that cost thirty dollars apiece — and the same old shingles are on the barn yet.

"I never knew just how it began, but one day early in October I saw Miss Ella talking to a man who was mending a fence by Richard's pasture south of her house. I didn't know him, but I'd seen him working there for several days and I supposed it was one of Richard's hired men. A husky fellow, straight, with crisp brown hair and a pleasant manner. Not much over thirty, I found out afterwards, and a good looking chap that anyone, man or woman, might like to look at twice.

"When I came in that night with the milk Miss Nichols was standing by the kitchen window looking out at the poplar trees. Her supper was burning on the stove, but she didn't seem to notice it. And the first thing she said was — 'It's awful the way I live, ain't it, Dagobert?' 'How do you mean?' I asked, rather taken aback, for Miss Ella and I never talked nothing much but business. 'So alone in the old house with no one around but Shep and Tom.' 'But

you have the youngsters with you all day,' I answered foolishly. 'Yes, other people's youngsters by the dozen, but what good does that do me?' she replied sharply. 'I guess it would be too noisy for you over at my house,' I said, thinking of the bedtime rows. 'An old damp cave-of-a-house,' she muttered more to herself than to me. 'I want you to cut down some trees, Dagobert. Yes, those old maples that my father planted. It's too shady around the house. Who is that man mending Richard's fence?' — Sharp as a shot like that. I told her I didn't know him, but I reckoned it was one of the hired men from Richard's place. 'Well, I just wondered. He's more friendly and polite than most hired men.' And then she began to stir her scorched tomatoes as if she had no idea what was the matter with them.

"And the very next day on her way home from school I saw Miss Nichols talking again to the fence man. That night I was late with my milking and it was just dusk when I came to the house. A mellowy breeze was dancing the dry leaves all around the yard and there was a great yellow evening star blinking through the maples. And all of a sudden I saw Miss Ella standing by the well as still as the old pump itself. 'Well,' I said, 'you almost scared me standing there so quiet. It's a fine night,' I blundered or something like that. She never said a word for a minute as if I was no more human than the milk pails. And then she seemed to come to with a start. 'Dagobert Dow,' she said, 'what are all those lights off there?' Pointing through the windy ma-

ples. ‘Lights in peoples’ houses, I reckon. Stuarts and Wesleys and my house and old Mr. Osborne’s.’ ‘Yes,’ she replied kind of shaky, ‘where there are lights there are people, not a person, but people—fathers and mothers and children. I never thought of it before, but all around my still old place there are *homes*. Even the Osbornes, old as they are, have had a home. You remember the Osborne children? A happy lot while they were growing up. We lost many apples because of the boys, but I never cared. And now the old folks sit alone by the fire, but they have something to remember at least. A person is entitled to a home, ain’t he, Dagobert? What do you think?’ I really thought she was a little out of her head, but I said I guessed folks was entitled to lots of things they never got. And Ella Nichols laughed, the poorest excuse for a laugh I ever heard, and I began to think it was one of those nervous breakdowns women have.

“For a while things went along about the same as usual. I had a good deal of work around her place, digging the potatoes and chopping down the trees she spoke of. And every time I noticed Miss Ella I could see that something was on her mind, something different. We had the fattest vegetables that year. Beets, carrots, and squashes fit for a fair, but she didn’t seem to take any interest in them. ‘What are they good for?’ she said kind of spitefully. ‘Take them home to your family, Dagobert, I’ve no use for them.’ Now I thought that was queer for her to give me the vegetables, for the Nicholses were

very careful about giving anything away that would bring in a dollar. Not that I call them stingy, but just to give you an idea how things were beginning to break up in Miss Ella. Restless, but quiet, pegging along the same old path, and yet she wasn't the same steady person I'd been working for all those years. But I didn't quite guess what the trouble was until the Sunday I went over to her place about five o'clock in the afternoon, and out by the grape-vines stood Ella Nichols and that man. She looked a little plagued when she saw me, but when I came along the path she said boldly — 'We were looking at the grapes. Mr. Dow, this is Mr. Mason.' It was the first time I had seen him very close. He wore a dark blue suit and there was a particularly clean look about him. I figured afterwards that it must have been that neat look that took Ella Nichols in so completely. I always thought she overdid the matter of soap and water myself. His face was not red, but a clear tan and his eyes were very brown and there was a queer little twist up-wards to his lips. I can see him now, strong and handsome as he looked that bright autumn Sunday by the grape arbor. In a few weeks I grew to hate him and his blasted brown eyes, but on that day I think maybe the devil hadn't quite got him. I remember how he looked at the corn field south of the barn. Just twenty acres, but a beautiful yield if I do say it — and then at the pasture. Miss Nichols had only thirty acres. Small of course, but as fine acres as ever lay out of doors. And I said to myself that

very day that that chap was looking over her farm pretty sharp. And Miss Ella — the poor woman — she had her hands knotted tight behind her, and her eyes were excited as if something new had happened to her. Think of it — excited like that for the first time when you are forty-one! I went on out to the pasture, but I never gave a thought to the old cows.

"The next Friday I told Miss Nichols I was ready to see the carpenter about repairing the barn, but she told me to let it go. She said she hadn't time to attend to it now, for she was going to Sioux City the next day — a fine state of affairs when she had been talking about the leaky barn for the last six months! That night when I came to cool the milk Miss Ella called out from the sitting room and told me to find the pans, for she was too busy to come herself. I was a little ruffled at having to fuss around in a woman's kitchen, and when I went out I was mean enough to look in the sitting room window to see what she was so blooming busy about, and what do you think she was doing? Trying on a hat, a big one with a feather, and she had on a new dress, purple, with silver lace on it. I hardly knew her — pale Ella Nichols decked out like that, for she always wore black and gray and stiff white waists as plain as a cupboard door. She pulled her hair out a little from her face and she tipped her head this way and that until I could hardly believe my eyes.

"And then Ed Mason began to stop at Miss Nichols' on Saturday nights when he came to town from

Richard's north farm. Not long you know, but he'd drive in the yard and ask about her flowers or make some excuse like that, and she would try to keep him as long as she could, but he seemed anxious to get away. He puzzled Miss Ella fearfully. Anyone could see that. She couldn't make him out at all, but what could she know of a live man when she'd been scolding little Johnnies and Susies all her life? But one Sunday she got him to stay to tea, and she wore the purple dress and I guess things went a little better; at least the neighbors began to notice his visits and I heard my youngsters at home giggling about Miss Nichols's beau. I never said anything myself, not even to my wife, but one day I saw him talking to her from the road; I was close to him and I thought the roguish curl in his lips looked mean and greedy. He was a queer fellow — friendly, and yet sly. He never liked me, I knew that well enough, for I guess he noticed how I watched him. He was not the least stooped like so many of us, but straight and quick and always spruce-looking. Just the kind to stir almost any woman, but to a poor school teacher like Miss Ella I suppose he seemed like a miracle.

"As the fine Indian Summer days slipped into frost I kind of hoped things were going well for Miss Ella, for she perked up wonderfully with the new clothes and the hope of having things like other women. Ed Mason came to see her every Sunday and stopped sometimes through the week, but I could see that his visits puzzled her a good deal, for

she didn't know how to please him. She wanted to pet him like she had always petted her collie, but you know a husky chap like Mason wouldn't stand for anything like that; but he led her on and on and gave her little presents, a string of beads and a watch chain. She showed them to me herself and blushed like a girl all the time.

"And then something happened, some sort of quarrel, I suppose, for the excitement of hope that had aroused her at first died in her like a snuffed wick. She was fearfully absent-minded and there was a kind of hardness in everything she said. She had to drive herself to school. She didn't complain but I knew how she hated it, and the young pirates and the silly lesson-books she's been facing for twenty years. Almost the last straw that broke Miss Ella was when Mason drove past her house one night with a young girl, Minnie Howard, sitting in the buggy beside him. Drove in daylight too so she'd be sure to see them. I wasn't really scared till that, and then I said to myself — look out — and sure enough Ella Nichols didn't care what happened after that. Everything had fooled her so. Ed Mason could do what he pleased. Men always can. I reckon it's the reason they're such sinners.

"I'll never forget the dull rainy night towards the last of November. I carried in Miss Ella's coal and kindling a bit late. She was eating her supper alone as usual with Shep sitting by her chair, and the big maltese cat blinking at her from the top of the sewing machine. She took no interest whatever in any-

thing before her. 'Twas a good deal as if she was doing some disagreeable chore like baiting a fish hook or cleaning a chimney flue — so don't-care, you know. I was worried and uneasy to see her like that, but there was nothing to do but just stand around as helpless as the cat and dog. I was about to go out the door when Miss Ella kind of started and said — 'Dagobert, you — you needn't come back any more.'

'Come back?' I said right after her. 'How do you mean?'

'Come back *here* like you've been doing for — for ever since my father died. The cows and all — your pay —' She stopped kind of choking and hid her face in her hands.

'Fer God's sake,' I says, shutting the door, 'what's the matter, Miss Nichols? What's the matter with me?'

'Nothing, Dagobert, nothing — Oh, I'm in so deep!' she sighed like the tiredest thing in the world.

'It's that man Mason,' I says sharply. 'I know. It's none of my affairs judging other peoples' lives, but he don't mean you any good, Miss Ella, coming here night after night. People —'

'What are they saying?' she asked like a hiss.

'Nothing,' I lied, 'but you know Roxbury.'

'Tell them to mind their own affairs,' she snapped.

'It's not human nature,' I said kind of blunt. 'I mean well, you know, Miss Ella,' for she had covered her face again and her shoulders were shaking, 'I've worked a long time for you and I'm sorry

there's no one close to stand by you now, and I don't want to be prying, but has he — has he asked you to marry him?'

'No,' she groaned hoarsely with her eyes still covered.

'He's a scoundrel then to treat you so, and I'll send him off myself if you're afraid to,' I offered stupidly. And then she stared at me more like a ghost than a woman.

'Send him off?' she cried. 'What for?'

'For making a fool of you, say it I must, Miss Nichols. If you were a young girl now —'

'But I'm *not* a young girl. There's the difference, the awful difference. You don't understand, Dagobert Dow, you don't understand *anything*. You're too hard and selfish and old to understand that I — that I want him —'

'You love him, then?'

'Yes.'

'There's nothing more for me to say,' and I turned to the door again. And then I stepped close to Ella Nichols and I said — 'I guess I understand more than you think. I'm no school child.' And she broke down and cried. I intended to be pretty pious, you know, before that, but the misery of her, the pale, shaking misery — 'I'm sorry, Miss Ella, sorry. Ain't there anything to help? The church, perhaps?' (for she had always gone to church). 'No,' she said as chilly as the rain slapping the window panes. 'But the Bible,' I floundered, and she jumped as if I had hurt her. 'Yes, the Bible,' she

faltering, 'I've thought of that, but I don't dare look at the thin still leaves. If I do I'm afraid I'll go back to the straight and narrow path — and I don't want to go back, Dagobert. It's a lonely, joyless path. I've tried it all my life and I know. Year after year, the same old round of dull duties — going to school and to church and planting seeds, and yet — I have never known what joy is —' Then she was doing this for joy — cutting loose from the old shore at forty-one for joy! 'I wish you joy,' I stammered, 'but I don't believe Ed Mason'll bring it to you — Shall I go?' 'Yes,' she said, the bitterest hardest word I ever heard.

"And I went out of her house, the house I'd been going to for ten years and more. Maybe you can guess how I felt, not for myself so much, but for her. What was the school teacher thinking of? What was she going to do? I went off through the grove as if I was going home, but I waited there in the dark to see if Mason came. About eight o'clock he drove in the yard. And as I stood there under the damp old trees my heart began to boil with hate and indignation against that man. I knew it was none of my business, and yet in a way it was. I'd been sort of looking after Miss Ella herself all those years as well as her cows and crops. And she was a lone woman and desperate now. If any harm came to her and the neighbors should say ugly things about her as they were already beginning to, I should be fearfully sorry — and I went back to the barn where Mason was putting up his horse.

'What's the idea?' I said standing in the path when he came out with the lantern in his hand.
'What's Miss Nichols sent me off for?'

'Because we don't want you, that's why,' and he started to go past me.

'We?' I says. 'And are you the boss here now?'

'I certainly am, and I want you to get off the place and stay off.'

'Not till I know you're treating Miss Ella fair and square,' I snapped, feeling my clothes getting tight.

'Miss Ella's affairs and mine are none of your business,' he growled, swinging his lantern around sassy-like.

'Why don't you marry her then like a man instead of compromising her like this?'

'I'll teach you to insult her —' and he knocked me down in the wet grass.

"I jumped up mighty quick and laid him flat as he'd done me. The old lantern smashed on the ground and went out. A pretty pair we were there in the dark floundering around like a couple of hounds, but I'm a strong man when I'm roused and I hope never to hate anyone as I hated that man. Powerful in the arms. Comes from pitching hay, you know, when I was a boy. I grabbed his hands and held them tight to his sides like a rope. 'You were too quick to start a row,' I says as cool as could be. He made an awful lunge and nearly threw me over, but I leaned over him hard till I felt the mud ooze under us. A fine rain blew in my face and damped Mason's Sunday clothes — and dark, sir, dark as hell, all but the little light gleaming from Miss Nichols's kitchen.

'Let me go,' he growled as low as he could, for I guess he didn't want anyone to hear us. 'Let me go or I'll blow yer head off.'

'And what with?' I jerked, suspicious in a minute.

'None of your business, but I've got it in my hip pocket.'

'You've told more than you ought,' I says sassy-like. 'Fellers don't carry things like that in this country without getting into trouble. Hand it over.' But I guess we'd been talking louder than we knew, for just then the kitchen door opened and the school teacher stood there slim and still in the yellow light. 'Mr. Mason,' she called kind of scared.

'Get off me,' he whispered and gave an awful kick and I lost my grip. He jumped up, whipped out a pistol quick as lightning and shot at me in the dark. If he hadn't been so shaking mad I wouldn't be telling you about it now, but it ripped past me and hit the shed door with a thud. To this day on a rainy fall night I can hear Ella Nichols's thin gasping scream. It was more as if she had been shot, sniped like a rabbit in the hedge.

"I slipped behind the shed as quick as an unarmed man ought to, and I heard Mason trying to brush the mud and rain off his clothes. 'It's nothing, Miss Ella,' he called, 'nothing but yer blasted man Dow. He tried to shoot me. Yes, sir, what do you think—jumped on me like a cat,' I heard him lying as he went up the kitchen steps. Miss Ella was holding the door open and one hand clutched

her left side. I wonder what she thought of her man that night with his back covered with mud, no hat, and his fine hair all ruffled up. But just then the door slammed to and shut in the yellow light and the muddy villain and the school teacher. Slammed to and brought old Dagobert Dow to his senses. I knew when I felt his body squirming under me and when he let that out about his gun, and better still when he shot at me, I knew about how much joy Miss Ella Nichols was likely to get—and I ran down the road to Roxbury as if the very witches were after me. Went straight to the sheriff's house (Bill Davis, it was then) and told him how Ed Mason had fired at me. Davis had some trouble in finding his deputy and we had to run around a bit, but it wasn't so very long before Bill's bays was stepping off at a pretty good pace towards Miss Ella's.

"There was the light in the sitting room just as before peeping out from the edges of the curtains. I led the way to the kitchen and the sheriff knocked on the door, a good hard knock, but no one came. 'Miss Nichols,' he called sharp as tacks, but the old house never said a word. Then he called again and walked right in. I hated to go into her house like that with officers, I, who had been peacefully carrying in milk and kindling for over ten years. And I thought with a jump how muddy our shoes were—Miss Ella dreaded dirt so. Right through to her sitting room, the three of us, without even a brushing. Not a sound, not a person, just the clock tick-

ing away on the shelf and the fire flames skipping up now and then past the draft in the stove. ‘Search the house,’ ordered Davis in his most sheriff voice. But I stood still and pointed to her secretary, for the doors and drawers were all burst open and papers were scattered about the floor. ‘Kidnapped the school teacher and her papers too, I reckon,’ I muttered, my heart going sick inside me.

“Bill and his men started through the rooms, but I slipped out to the barn. Not a sign of his horse and buggy. With my lantern I saw his tracks in the soft ground — man, horse, and wheels, but no sign of a woman. If the school teacher was not with Ed Mason, where was she? I leaned against the grind stone like a sick man. I felt the same choking in my heart that I did the night my boy died. Then I went back over the ground very careful, and in a smooth place by the wood shed I found a woman’s foot prints. I didn’t call the men, for if Miss Ella was to be found I wanted to find her myself. They’re kind of rough, sheriffs, but I suppose they can’t help it. I crept along bent over so that I could see the marks, for they led right out to the garden and towards the grove, the path I always took home. And I hadn’t more than reached the third row of trees when I saw someone in the path standing straight and still as a grave stone. ‘Ella — Ella Nichols,’ — I cried, but she never answered. Standing like some strange creature in a picture, her eyes gleaming in the dim light, her old gray shawl held tight over her breast and in her other hand a lantern

with no light in it. For a minute we stood staring at each other as if we were strangers. I remember how the wind blew her dress, the fine silk dress she wore for that man, blew it against the oily old lantern. I can see her yet of a rainy night, stark and still, with her silly lantern. 'Tell me,' I says again, 'tell me, what's happened? Why are you out here in the night? Where's Mason?' But images tell no tales and neither did the strange-looking woman under the dripping maples. If her eyes had not shone so fiercely and if her hand hadn't clutched white at the shawl I should have called her a corpse instead of a living being. And the way she looked at me—Ed Mason's shot was nothing to those piercing eyes. 'Speak, Miss Ella,' I cried, coming closer and holding out my hand. 'Tell me everything. We have come to help you. Mason shall not hurt you, only tell me what you know.' But do you think she spoke? Never a word, sir, no more than the twisted old tree beside her. A dead person don't stand up like that and roll the eyes—no, Ella Nichols wasn't dead, but all that we knew of her, mind and senses, had gone out like the poor light in her hand. 'Come,' I said softly as I might say to my littlest boy when he's ailing, 'come back to the house, it's too cold out here,' and I reached for her hand, slipping the lantern away. She didn't struggle or hold back, but walked along with me limp and still as her collie might have done. I dreaded to take her to the house, her house, where those sheriffs were, but there was nothing else to do. Up the slip-

pery steps and into the room where Davis was looking at the papers he'd found on the floor. I held up my hand to Bill in warning, so he wouldn't roar the same questions I had asked her, and then I drew a chair to the fire, for she was trembling from head to foot. I told Bill she was stark mad as far as I could make out and I thought we ought to have some woman in the house right away, and Bill sent for his wife—and that's all there is about the school teacher.

"She's down at the County Farm now. Seven years this December, and we don't know no more what happened than if she had died. And Ed Mason never came back to tell us, for he took her deeds and insurance papers, although they never did him no good, I reckon. Folks have different opinions, of course. There was a great doctor from Omaha, a specialist for nervous sickness, who said the school teacher's condition was brought about by continuous nervous strain with sudden shock to the emotions—whatever that means. Some think Mason struck her when he stole her papers, but I have always kind of thought it was a case of starvation."

And the birch tree swayed softly above us just as it had swayed that other October when the nights were light and still with just a little breeze blowing to let you know 'twas earthly.

To Us In Eden

By MAHLON LEONARD FISHER

To us in Eden, where the wood
A shelt'ry hut has heavened there,
Will come a summons understood —
A whisper down the cloudy stair.

And we shall close our oaken door,
Who nevermore may come agen
To where the sagging, furrowed floor
Is easy to the feet of men.

And we shall climb the midnight sky;
And we shall walk into the Dawn,
Until at length before us lie
Its level splendors, like a lawn. . . .

But for this Eden in a grove
And at the edge of Heaven set,
Our spirit-fingers, interwove,
Will tighten, and our eyes be wet!

To The Memory of Buffalo Bill

By RICHARD WARNER BORST

Immortal youth,
You for whom waits the universal spectacle,
You who have led at your heels
The wild broncho, the evil mustang,
And the tawny buffalo
Of the prairie stretches;
You who have led these creatures
Through the thoroughfares of cities
And past the thrones of princes:
For you, now,
The deep abysses between the stars
Are full of strange shapes.
Behemoth and leviathan are there,
And nameless sprawling monsters,
Whose sides are as the sides of mountains,
Whose cries are more terrible than thunder,—
Vague forms that have dwelt
Since time began,
On unknown stars;
In the nethermost glooms
Of all the uttermost realms of cosmos,
Hide immense and eyeless beings,
Beyond the reach of the beams
Of the mightiest of the suns,
Deep in the caverns of unimagined space.

A task awaits you, dreamer, adventurer,—
To summon the infinite round-up
With a wave of your imperious hand;

To gather together
In the gulfs between the stars and the planets,
An innumerable menagerie
Of all earth-born and star-born creatures,
Creatures ramping and screaming,
Yelling outlandish yells,
Whose voices reverberate interminably
Against the oceans and the mountain-sides
Of thrice ten million worlds:
Creatures with fangs that gleam
And with wings that spread over the moons;
Whose shapes we cannot understand
Because of the haunts in vastness
Behind the universes,
Where they have dwelt.

And the beings who command
The life in other spheres,
Who fight long wars
And call themselves the lords of creation,
Some of them will be marshalled
To join the procession
And parade — parade.

And so amazing will be the sight,
And so astounding the tumult,
Of all those far-sought marvels,
As they make lamentation,
Crying out in the inter-stellar void;
And so mysterious the looks
Of all those foreign, aye, other-worldly men, —
If they be men, —
That the angels will cease

Their antiphonal choiring
For the space of half an aeon,
Gazing spell-bound,
While, past the throne of Jaweh,
In your broad stetson,
With your pointed goatee,
On your gray stallion,
Leading the procession,
You ride by!

Two Poems

By MAXWELL ANDERSON

DESPAIR

Now, when the north-wind drags the winter down
Upon our helpless prairies here, and cries
All night long in the darkness and the cold,
Hating itself for being what it is —
So bleak and miserable, with frosty hands
And chill breath that forever shut it out
From friendship — I must linger out of doors
A moment when I can to watch the clouds —
Crouched, grey, old men, whispering and muttering
To one another of the storms to come.

The rust-red winter sunset drooping low
A bleared and frozen head against the grey
That rims the prairies, and the dull new night
Upon us. Sadness permeates the earth,
The lifeless light, the wind; and throughout all
Creeps the awed foretaste of unending cold.

AUTUMN AGAIN

The winds have risen,
The plains are swept;
The tiny prison
Where birds have slept
Sways to the blast
Clinging fast.

Fallen the leaves,
The boles are bare;
Earth receives
A plaid to wear
To save from the breath
Of near death.

Sweet and sweeter
The wild fruit falls;
And that frost-cheater,
The meadow-lark, calls
To a supper of seeds
From the weeds.

The Postage Stamp

By WILLIAM MERRIAM ROUSE

A two-cent postage stamp came in a letter from Emmeline. Grandma Abigail Dunker wrapped it up in a little piece of white paper and put it in her worn reticule. Then she returned the reticule to its accustomed place in the top drawer of the cherry bureau in the front room.

She was not much interested in the letter itself. It was merely a duty-inspired pencil scrawl from one of her daughters; with the stamp as a careless afterthought. There were children, and grand-children, and great grand-children, scattered far. Grandma kept little count of them, or they of her. She had learned that generations come and go—and her generation had gone.

The postage stamp was another matter; and of great present importance, for many months had passed since Grandma Dunker had known the feel of money. Her pension check came every quarter, but she at once turned it over to the general store at the village, whence she received all necessities. She knew there was never quite enough to pay her bill; and she had not dared these several years to ask for any cash.

“Lucy Ann!” she called, in the cracked bark of old, old age. She moved into the kitchen, thumping her cane smartly on the bare floor. “Plague take that young ‘un! Where’s she gone now?”

Lucy Ann, a half grown grand-child, had been stranded by some fortuitous wave on the western shore of Grandma Dunker's life. Grandma accepted her as a natural event, and brought her up in the way that the future wife of some hard-working man should go. At this moment Lucy Ann rose from behind the cook stove with the broom in her hand and the color of belligerency in her healthy face.

"The cat's stole a rind of pork I had to grease the fryin' pan," with an eye on her grandmother's cane, "and I was jest tryin' to show her she's only a cat."

"You let the cat alone and listen to me! Your Aunt Emmeline has put a postage stamp in her letter, and I'm goin' to send for a mail order catalogue!"

Lucy Ann drew in a deep breath. Her eyes glistened. The cat, unheeded, scuttled into the pantry.

"Goody! Ain't that great!"

"It's satisfyin'," admitted Grandma. "I've got tired of sendin' to borrow the Pangborn's, and have them come after it the very next day. We'll have one of our own now. We'll show 'em, I guess, we ain't too poverty-stricken to have a catalogue!"

"It'll be a newer one than the one they got!" Lucy Ann's voice shrilled in excitement. "Do you s'pose they'll be colored pictures of the dresses? I'll pick me out a —"

Grandma Dunker stopped the flood with a thump of her cane.

"You won't look at it a-tall if you let that bread burn in the oven, young lady! Stop your clack and take out a loaf and let me see it!"

Silence fell upon Lucy Ann, but nothing could suppress the anticipatory joy that shone from her face. With that joy the old woman was in perfect sympathy. She, too, felt joy after the manner of her years. A flame with Lucy Ann, with her it was a glow.

She would write the letter that evening and within a week the mail order catalogue would be in her hands; a thing to amuse, to stimulate the imagination, a sedative for all unsatisfied longings. Such catalogues had become classic, displacing the almanac: one of them was inexhaustible through a year of evenings. Through the valley and over the countryside as far as the knowledge of Grandma Dunker extended the catalogue functioned thus. Most people, indeed, were able actually to order things and receive them, thrilling, from the rural free delivery carrier. But not she, nor the few very poor — and to them the catalogue was greatly more than to the others. They read endlessly the close printed pages in keen but safe pleasure: they were not able to buy at all.

Grandma Dunker settled down in her wooden rocker in the front room — her sleeping chamber and sanctum — and looked out into the dull autumn afternoon. Not even prospect of the catalogue could lift her up for long on such a day. Dead leaves; black trees; and the steely river beyond them. Sky and mountains met in gray accord. It was one of the days when the humming past came up to mock her — to take away the toothsomeness of what she ate and the warmth from her friendly wood fire.

It was fitting that Laura Thorne should come in for a few minutes on such a day: and because it was a day of memories Grandma did not see the limp, the threadbare coat, the wrinkles and the faded eyes of her visitor. Instead she saw silk, flaring out over hoops: she heard laughter and the sound of violins. Lights and the jingle of sleigh bells, and tables piled with the dainties of a former time, were in her mind.

"How are you, Grandma?" The voice had in it the taste of repeated sorrows, and disconcertingly it brought the older woman back to the distant present.

"I'm smart." Her cane banged tremendously. "Lucy Ann — plague take that young 'un! — drag in a chair out of the kitchen for Mis' Thorne, an' don't be all day about it, neither! I'm glad you come. I was jest thinkin' about you, and your Pa, and your Gran'pa."

"I don't do much else but think, nowadays." She sat down clumsily.

Grandma Dunker dug into a deep pocket and put on her glasses, peering through them searchingly. Some more than usual leadenness in the tone and bearing of the other had stirred her.

"Laury," she used her privilege of dropping ceremony, "I done the washing for your fambly for twenty years, didn't I? And I helped nuss you and the rest of the Mansfield children, didn't I? Hey?"

"Yes, Grandma, you did."

"Well, Laury, I'm a-goin' to ask you something that I want to know. I want to know if you're well

pervided for, and comfortable. Have you got lots of firewood and plenty — plenty to eat? Hey?"

Laura Thorne swallowed hard.

"Yes."

"Be you sure?"

"Yes."

"Well, then, they's something else I want to know!" Grandma waxed belligerent. "I want you should tell me if you hear from Jimmy reg'lar. Does he write to you, hey?"

"I get a check every week — like clockwork!"

"But Jimmy himself don't write, does he?"

Mrs. Thorne straightened up, with a flare of the Mansfield pride in her faded eyes.

"Jimmy Thorne is a good son — I don't want to hear a word against him! Not a word!"

"Who's sayin' anything against him? Hey!" She pounded the floor fiercely. "Don't you talk back to me, Laury Thorne! I put your first short dresses on you — and washed dew-dabs and fol-de-rols for you for the next twenty year! Huh!"

A big tear, slow, unlovely, rolled down the nose of the other woman.

"Huh!" Grandma Dunker snorted. "I guess I remember when my husband, Abram, was the best teamster your Pa had! I guess I remember when your Pa owned 'most all this valley, from mountain to mountain! String of his teams goin' by all day long! They wa'n't anybody in this county that didn't listen when Alexander Mansfield said anything! Didn't I help every time they was a party up

to your house — you an' Mary an' Sophy wanted to dance all night in them days!"

Grandma's voice grew milder, and ceased. Suddenly Laura Thorne put her head down, awkwardly, and wept with the difficult grief of age.

"Jimmy — don't — write — to — me!" she said, through her sobs. "Not a word since along in the spring — just a check comes in an envelope. I'd rather he'd write once than send all the money in the world! I know he's busy — New York's a busy place — but it does seem as though he could write to his mother once in a while! He's all I've got!"

The outburst died away as suddenly as it had begun. Laura Thorne wiped her eyes, and the twisting of her face relaxed.

"You've wrote to him, ain't you?"

"Of course!" indignantly. "I've written every week — always!"

"How long's he been in that pesky city, hey?"

"He went right there from college, five years ago. He was home once, for a few days, you know."

"Huh!" Grandma took off her spectacles and put them in her pocket. "Have you got that receipt for brown bread the way your Ma made it?"

"What?" Mrs. Thorne asked, dazedly. "Brown bread? Oh, yes!"

"You write it off for me and I'll send Lucy Ann up for it afore dark. I can make brown bread but, shucks! it ain't anything to what your Ma could make! It'll taste like old times to have some brown bread after her receipt."

"All right," answered Mrs. Thorne, absently. She rose and moved toward the door. "I must be going — I just ran down for a few minutes to break the afternoon up. So many empty rooms make me shudder sometimes."

"Good-by, Mis' Thorne. Come agin!"

When the door had closed behind her visitor a slow smile widened the long since toothless mouth of Grandma Dunker. She wagged her head and spoke triumphantly to herself. "Got rid of her quick enough, didn't I, soon's I stopped talkin' about Jimmy and begun to talk about brown bread!"

She went to the cherry bureau and rummaged in her reticule until she found a folded sheet of note paper. Again her spectacles came forth and she read, jerkily: "In case of death or dangerous illness notify That's it. Now I'll get rid of that plaguey young 'un."

She stumped into the kitchen, sniffing at the good smell of fresh bread. She poked the loaves with a crooked forefinger.

"You might uv done worse!" to Lucy Ann, bringing a flush of pleasure to the girl's face. "If I live long enough I'll make a good cook out of you — now get on your things an' go up to Mis' Thorne's after a receipt. March your boots, and don't come back for half an hour! I got a letter to write, and I don't want you around under foot!"

"Yes, ma'am!"

As Grandma Dunker had intended, the well deserved compliment put wings to her feet. Lucy Ann

disappeared in a flurry. Muttering, the old woman went back into the front room.

"She's a good young 'un. . . . I don't know how I'm goin' to fix up this business. Drat it! I'm an old fool!"

For half an hour, breathing hard, she labored with pen and ink.

A week from the day of the brown bread recipe Grandma Abigail Dunker sat in the front room and stared out across the road and beyond the steely blue river. Taking counsel with herself, she admitted that she was as mad as a wet hen. She had been an old fool, she believed, and the result and the consciousness of her folly combined to take away the good taste of food and the pleasure in the warmth of a hardwood fire.

Lucy Ann came in, uncertainly.

"Gran'ma —"

"Well! Say it! Don't stand there like a gawky, with your mouth open!"

"Gran'ma, ain't it — ain't it 'most time for that catalogue to be a-comin'?"

"What catalogue, you loon?" She tried to speak as though there were no such thing as a catalogue in the world.

"The mail order catalogue you said you'd send for with the stamp in Aunt Emmeline's letter!"

"Hey?"

"I see you mail the letter!" Driven by the bottled anticipation of a week, Lucy Ann had mustered

rare courage. "I see you put it in the letter box right the next day after the stamp come!"

"You did, hey? Huh! Well!" The voice of the old woman lost much of its raucousness as she continued. "Well, Lucy Ann, I'm sorry, but they ain't going to be no catalogue."

"No catalogue?" The girl's face looked stupid, as from a blow. "No catalogue, Gran'ma?"

"No, Lucy Ann, I had some business to 'tend to with that postage stamp. The letter wa'n't for the catalogue. I ain't got another stamp and I ain't a-goin' to begin to beg — not at my age."

"Oh dear!"

Into the simple exclamation Lucy Ann threw all the woe of her broken hope; of the loss of a long winter's amusement; of the fading of the pictures of many dresses. Unashamed, she sniveled; and her shoulders drew down hopelessly as she turned back to the kitchen.

Grandma Dunker stared after her with a mouth that had become a straight line. Hitherto through the week it had been her own disappointment and self-reproach with which she had been concerned: it had made her peevish and irritable, she knew, and perhaps just a little mite hard on Lucy Ann. Now she realized that the girl had borne up remarkably well, repressing all the coltish tendency of youth to kick and yaw against the bit. Expectancy of the catalogue alone had given her this unusual meekness. Through the far, dim decades Grandma sighted something of the inwardness of a girl's mind, and

she knew now that here was a little tragedy in her house. To her the loss had been one of those mockeries with which life sometimes taunts the old, but to Lucy Ann denial of that printed and pictured story of silks and flummuries was poignant grief.

"Dum it!" she muttered. "I'd jest as lief swear as not!"

Through her anger a knock sounded. It was a well-bred knock, and she answered it with the shade of deference that she had had for three generations of Mansfields.

Laura Thorne came in with a shining afternoon face; a face filled with the glow of late happiness. No longer did her eyes seem faded: her shoulders again had the Mansfield set.

"He's come!" she cried, with the ecstasy of those who sing from their hearts. "He came last night on the sleeper, and walked all the way from the station! The money that boy must have spent on the things he brought me—it's wicked! Things I'll never use in the world!"

But there was no condemnation in her voice, rich with modulations of tenderness. Grandma Dunker grunted.

"Who's come?"

"Jimmy—my boy! Aren't you interested, Grandma?"

"Yes. I be. He's a Mansfield, even if his name ain't the same."

"Of course he is!" Her words pattered out happily, like running children. "He looks like his

grandfather more than ever! He's coming down to see you as soon as he gets rested—I let him sleep to-day."

"Huh!"

"He's grown better looking—but you'll see! I've got to hurry back now and get his dinner—it just seemed that I must run down and tell you!"

"I'm glad, Laury. You tell him I'm glad."

"You can tell him yourself, Grandma!" Laura Thorne laughed like a girl as she went out, bringing the door shut smartly. One not seeing her would have said that a girl had flown in and out of the room.

"Dum it all!" anathemized Grandma Dunker, emphatically and for her own ears. She stared fixedly toward the cherry bureau. "This's a nice puppy-snatch I've got myself into!"

She began to edge her rocking chair toward the bureau, letting her cane fall to the floor with a great clatter.

"You rap for me, Gran'ma?"

She twisted around sharply, to find Lucy Ann standing in the kitchen door.

"Rap?" she barked. "Huh! March your boots out of here—and don't you let me see hide nor hair of you 'til I do rap!"

The eyes and nose of Lucy Ann were red and swollen; her voice had been clogged by imprisoned sobs. Grandma Dunker jerked open the big bottom drawer of the cherry bureau.

"Dum the luck!" she growled; and added, angrily: "I ain't goin' to swear no more!"

Her hand, veined and knotted and marked by many labors, lifted tenderly a long, white-sheeted bundle. She laid it across her lap and drew out the pins slowly. Inside the sheet was a layer of paper, and the smell of red cedar chips — sovereign against moths. Then to view came the heavy folds of a silk dress; black with a tiny sprig of lavender. Yards and yards of cloth were in the skirt, but the waist had been made to fit tightly the body of a young and slender woman. The silk fibres sounded protestingly as the old woman's rough hands caressed them.

"Old Mis' Mansfield give it to me for a weddin' present." She spoke in a whisper. "They's no use denyin' I'd of looked nice laid out in that — but it won't make no difference to a corpse. And she's young and the fun of bein' alive won't wear off for quite a spell yet. Huh!"

Grandma Dunker stooped, recovered her cane, and whanged the floor in deadly earnest. The head and shoulders of Lucy Ann appeared, tentatively.

"Come on in here!" commanded Grandma, but with husky gruffness. "Don't stand there and gawp! Got your bread out of the oven? All right, then. Now stand up here in front of me for a minute!"

"Gran'ma!" breathed Lucy Ann, doubtfully.
"Gr—"

"Stop talkin' when I'm busy! I know what you're goin' to say, an' I'll tell you. It's a silk dress for you, an' I don't want to hear no complainin' because it ain't red, or green, or yaller!"

"A *silk* dress?" A hundred wiggles shook the sturdy frame of Lucy Ann. "Oh glory—"

"Stand on both feet, can't you? How be I goin' to take your measure? Guess you ain't so down in the mouth over that catalogue as you was — hey?"

"Will you make it up with a long skirt, Gran'-ma?"

"Huh! I thought not! Yes — to your shoe-tops. Stand still, you loon! We ain't got time to clutter our minds up with a catalogue — it'll take a considerable spell to make this dress. If you twitch your arms agin, young lady, I'll box your ears and you won't get the dress!"

Instantly Lucy Ann became as rigid as the stove poker and so she stood, with only her gloating eyes uncontrolled, until the ordeal was over. Then the vigorous cane chased her into the kitchen and Grandma Dunker was alone once more.

Carefully she spread the silk dress out on her bed, ready for the shears of sacrifice. She turned her back upon it, resolutely, and stumped to the front door — then out into the pale autumn sunlight. She lifted her head and sniffed the keen air, staring off toward the bright blue peaks that reached up until they disappeared in the unclouded peace of the heavens.

"Things is sweet and smelly this time of year," she murmured. "Makes a body feel young again!"

Sark of the Leewards

By RICHARD BUTLER GLAENZER

"The wreck of all that's solid, big and fine,"
The skipper groaned. "Ten years ago, to dine
With Sark redeemed whole months in ports like this.
I never met a man so grand with dreams. . . .
Jove! When he talked, his eyes would send out
gleams

Brighter than island fireflies. But his wife,
She'd squat there like a Carib-stone. No word
From her; just sullenness that sneered 'Absurd!'
Yet she was handsome in some nameless way. . . .
And now he's drinking, slacking, slipping down
To God knows what; still, miles above this town.
Tell him I sent you. Patois is his forte—
One of a score. He'll lend you any books
You need, and — don't confuse him with his looks!"

The townsfolk bored me, so I looked up Sark
One night. The weeds around his bungalow
Blotted the path. The garden seemed to grow
Haphazard; branches struck my face, one sweet,
Too sweet, a frangipani's. The whole porch
Was snarled with vines. No lights. I flashed my
torch,

Made out the door and knocked. A shuffling step,
And I was greeted with a slattern's "Well!"
A reddish wrapper was the woman's shell:
Her face I never really saw; her voice,
My business stated, rasped me with a "There!"

A finger as abruptly pointing where
A shadowy figure lounged. I coughed. It rose
Yawning, advanced, said thickly: "I am Sark,
If it is he you want." It was so dark
I all but missed the hand whose firm, strong grip
Denied the fumes whose presence proved him weak.
I hedged. No use. "Decent of you to seek
Me out like this. Come, try this Berbice chair!
The skipper sent you? Good! The skipper's friend
Would be *amicus certus in* — the end!"
This with a mirthless laugh. "A smoke? a drink?"
My cool refusal made him laugh again,
This time like sunlight when it braves March rain.

The woman did not linger. I was glad;
I would have never stuck it if she had,
And suddenly I felt his need cry to me
And knew that I must listen, though I fear
Mixed with the wish to help was that to hear.

His eyes — the skipper was correct — they blazed;
And I, I listened, startled, shaken, dazed
By all the splendors — more than speech was his —
By all the rocking splendors which rolled out
Funneled with flame, a gold-spun water-spout.
Such was his force, his swinging speed, his height,
Reaching from silt to star — until he broke
And sucked me down to share a stifling smoke
Through which dragged heavily his final words,
Pitiless, shameless, hopeless, first and last,
As if a god had turned iconoclast:

"She? It's the old, old story. Man's conceit
Hankers for what it fails to understand,—
The fascination of Fate's ampersand.
But Fate, remember, is the weaker self
Made master of the will. So what I got
Is what I destined; what I am, a sot,
Only my own velleity in terms
Of liquor. For the choice was mine, and then
Again the choice was mine, all mine! Amen."

My Grave

By HAZEL HALL

Make it fast with earth and grass;
Dig it deep, dig it deep;
Let me hear no footstep pass
Where I sleep.

Let me hear no wind I love,
Scattering, garnering;
Feel no stir of roots above;
Know no Spring.

For if I hear you, Life,
I shall reach up with roots
To drink the dew,
Loving you;
And I am tired, Life—
I would sleep.

Four Poems

By MARJORIE ALLEN SEIFFERT

SORROW

Sorrow stands in a wide place,
Blind — blind —
Beauty and joy are petals blown
Across her granite face;
They cannot find
Sight or sentience in stone.

Yesterday's beauty and joy lie deep
In sorrow's heart, asleep.

THE MOONLIGHT SONATA

My soul, storm-beaten as an ancient pier
Stands forth into the sea: wave on slow wave
Of shining music, luminous and grave,
Lifting against me, pouring through me, here
Find wafts of unforgotten chords which rise
And droop like clinging sea-weed. You, so white,
So still, so helpless, on this fathomless night
Float like a corpse with living, tortured eyes.
Deep waves wash you against me: you impart
No comfort to my spirit, give no sign
Your inarticulate lips can taste the brine
Drowning the secret timbers of my heart.

ELEGY

I would be autumn earth and hold
Your beautiful body, slain,
Where lying still and cold
Only the winter rain
Shall touch your limbs and face;
Where the white frost shall wed
Your body to black mould
In the close passionless embrace
Of that dark marriage bed:
I would be autumn earth and hold
Your beautiful body, dead.

BALLAD

Follow, follow me into the South
And if you are brave and wise
I'll buy you laughter for your mouth,
Sorrow for your eyes.

I'll buy you laughter, wild and sweet,
And sorrow, grey and still,
But you must follow with willing feet
Over the farthest hill.

Follow, follow me into the South,
You may return tomorrow,
Wearing my kisses on your mouth,
In your eyes my sorrow.

"Blessed Are the Dead"

By MAGDELENE CRAFT

"Blessed are the dead," droned the minister. Liza shivered a little. From her place in the mourners' room she could see the black draped coffin with its load of tightly bunched flowers atop. The open door showed the dusty street in the morning sunlight beyond the little grassplot of a lawn. Liza glanced across at John. He was sitting with his head bowed, looking absently at the floor.

"Blessed are the dead that sleep in the Lord," — the minister was repeating. It did not seem to Liza as if her mother were dead. Instead of the minister's monotone, she could hear as plainly as if the speaker were beside her; — "I don't want for you to marry John," came her mother's strong, clear voice. "He's always questionin' in his mind what people will say. Right ain't right for him, it's just what folks'll think of him. But you'll marry him anyhow, I suppose. You wouldn't be my daughter if you didn't." It had been so long ago. And Liza had married John. Good patient John. Her mother's words rang in her mind — "not right to him. Just what people will say." It was quite true. But he had been a good man to her, and always gentle to her mother when she had grown old and come to live with them. A little flash of resentment stirred in Liza. John had been patient and her mother had badgered him unmercifully.

Especially about the church. John was a member, not because of any devout conviction, but because it

had "looked better." Her mother had always protested against the church. Her long life of service and help had never had its inspiration from churchly doctrine. "I reckon there is a God," she had said, "but he ain't confined in the churches. Them's shut six days a week an' a real God has to tend to business more'n one day out of seven."

When she grew old, she grew intolerant,—she had hated the ministers unreasoningly. "I hope I die at Marthy's," she had said. Martha was her other daughter. "Her an' Ed wouldn't be afraid to have me buried without a minister, if I wanted it. Ed ain't afraid of what folks say." Ed was Martha's husband. Ed was not a particularly good man. But his breezy joviality gave him the ability to do things counter to public opinion, an ability that her mother had always admired. And Liza was her mother's daughter.

"Ed ain't such a good man, but Marthy's happier than you are." The words echoed in her mind. She had denied them with a passionate loyalty.

"The Lord gave—" the voice of the minister intruded on her thoughts. Liza caught her hands together in a painful clasp. How often she had heard the dead woman protest against the verse. "The Lord may ha' given, but it's generally man's foolishness that takes away. If anybody says that at my funeral, I'll rise up in the casket."

But they were saying it at her funeral—if that woman there in the casket were her mother. Liza could not believe it. The memory of the last days

came before her. Martha had come, and Ed. Some-way at the last her mother had forgotten her resent-ment at John. Her mind had grown clearer, more tolerant. "I suppose the neighbors 'ld talk if the parson wasn't at my funeral," she had said. "It don't make no difference to me either way. But the feelin's of the livin' is of more importance than those of the dead. Suit yourself, Lizy." They had always been an outspoken family, but Liza had made no answer. Ed had looked contemptuously at her and John. She had been sorry — heartsore, not for herself, but for John.

She moved uneasily at the recollection. A sudden surge of feeling pressed her further into her torment. The day they had made arrangements for the funeral, she had asked him, "Shall we ask the minister, John?" She had expected him to say yes, but he had looked at her with a queer humility, — "What you want, Lizy, — or what she wanted," — and he had glanced at Ed, Ed with a little sneer on his handsome face.

So he had shown he was afraid, afraid of what Ed and Martha might say. Liza, in swift pain and anger, had flamed out, "Then we'll ask him! You see about it today." She was not afraid. And John had looked at her as if she had struck him. But now, — as she listened to the monotonous talk, the remorse for her disloyalty to the dead overwhelmed her. Would the minister never be through? It seemed as if she could scream, there in that little room. Martha was sobbing.

Liza looked again at John. He had raised his head and was staring at the minister.

"The Lord gave and the Lord hath—" John had risen and crossed the room, swiftly, surely; he was standing at the minister's side. "Don't say it," he said, low but clear. "She wouldn't ha' wanted it. She never did want it." The people were all staring at him in amaze. Ed was gazing, jaws foolishly apart. John flushed a little, then,—"You can just say 'Blessed be the name of the Lord.' She lived like that." And he was back in the mourners' room again. The minister, in confusion, mumbled, "Let us pray."

But Liza, her plain face radiant, was looking at her husband. Pain, remorse, anger were swept away. Her mother would have been glad of this—and in all the world she would never again be ashamed of John. It seemed as if in her soul a thousand tongues were choiring, "Blessed be the name of the Lord!"

Pastel for March

By MABEL KINGSLEY RICHARDSON

The twilight skies are grey with gathering rain,
The melting snows lie grey on hill and plain,
And silver is the wild duck's wing;
The river, and the barren wind-swept trees
Are grey. Yet strangely do I sense in these
The rosy-footed ways of spring.

The Midland

A MAGAZINE OF
THE MIDDLE WEST

MAY-JUNE, 1919

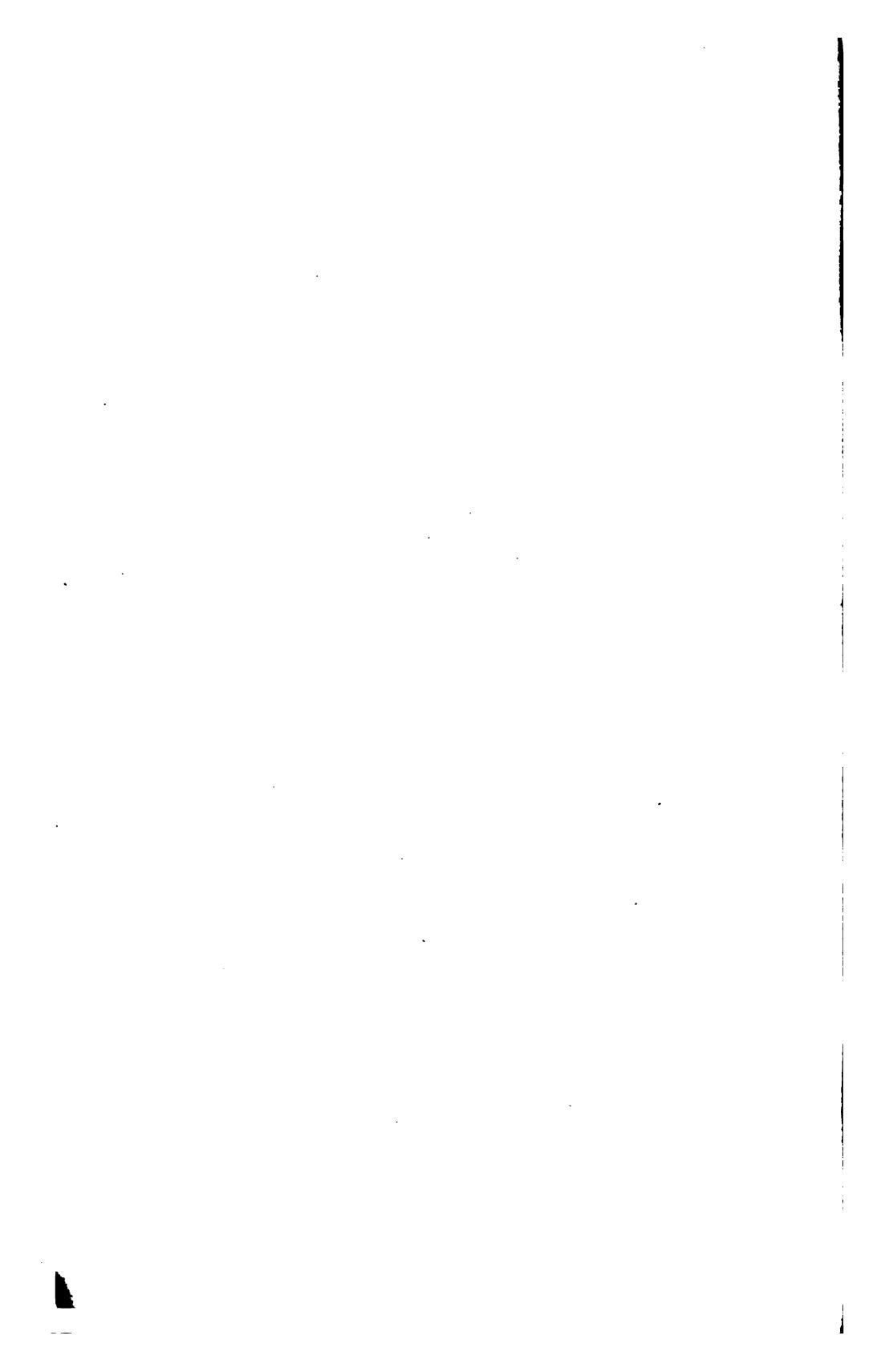
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The Midland

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NOS. 5-6

The Wood Thrush

By LIZETTE WOODWORTH REESE

Dark in the hollow;
Light on the hill;
Mallows in the grey yards,
Rosy-lipped and still.
Hush, hush!
From his closet in the dew,
Hark to the thrush!

Of what his singing?
Camelot, Rome?
Old houses in the wind?
Candlelight, home?
Yea, nay.
And of my early love,
Gone many a day.

Three Poems

By FLORENCE KILPATRICK MIXTER

ESTRANGED

Is there some word
That you or I might say,
To light the silence
With one golden ray?

We speak with lips
Cold or compassionate;
Their deeper meaning
Inarticulate.

Sometimes a flower
Or melody of flute
Almost reveals
Proud spirits that are mute.

Last night in sleep
The golden ray shone through!
Last night I dreamed. . . .
Ah, what are dreams to you!

THE CANDLE

One candle lit beside the bed
Throws but a mocking light
Upon a soul stretched out in pain
Beneath the dreadful night.

The arms are tense, as if some weight
Long held from off the heart,
Had slowly crushed the knotted hands
And forced their strength apart.

The coverlet lies like a shroud,
All smooth and without fold,
Oblivious of what it drapes —
A spirit numb with cold.

The mouth is like an iron vise;
The closed eyes do not see;
The soul that knows no compromise
Is fighting to go free.

Disturb him not, who come to knock
With pity or dismay.
Nor ask who lit the candle
And softly stole away.

IN MEMORY OF —

I think of you as one
Who often came
Close to the wooded shore to watch the sun
Go down in flame;

As one who dreamed
Until the night grew cold,—
Heart of a child! For you the dark hills gleamed
With infinite gold.

As one who turned
Back to the shadowy room,
Your spirit's afterglow sole light that burned
Amid the gloom.

Landscape

By HELEN HOYT

What need to stay my soul on Chinese vases?
There is the Fox River's beauty of green banks out
of my window
And near the paper factory the red-brown of
stripped logs,
Rich ochre in the sunset:
The factory, gaunt, like a great ship on the water's
edge, smoke-blackened.
And that heaped-up glowing drenched brown of raw
logs.

Love Everlasting

By WANDA FRAIKEN

Two shadowy figures, melting together in the moonlight, walked up and down along the river bank, pausing, taking a step or two forward, and then standing motionless again. At last, as they disappeared into the kind gloom thrown out by the soft guardian arms of some willows overhanging the water close by them, a feverish tumult of low spoken words broke a long silence.

"You — you know that I'm wild about you," Ralph Wallace was telling Esther, a swaying, delicate creature, enveloped in clouds of night mist. "When you look at me with those blue eyes of yours —" Esther Drew raised her eyes to his. "I run after you like a sick pup. You make a fool of me — you know it — you enjoy making a fool of me."

She dropped her eyes demurely and stood away from him a little. "I — I don't know. I didn't say that I didn't like it, did I?"

"Esther," he whispered. He drew closer to her. "Don't — don't." His arm fell back. "I — I won't touch you."

She took hurried steps forward. "We must go back," she reminded him in a faint voice. Soon they were on the country road again, on one side of which a board walk had been built up on stilt-like supports on account of the river which sometimes flooded the road in the spring.

Esther dropped down on the walk, swinging her feet against the tall grass below. She felt very tired after their aimless wandering. Ralph sat down close beside her, his hand resting on her arm. Esther could smell the apple blossoms not far away. In the moonlight, the outlines of the trees rose distinctly like graceful goddesses. The last sleepy twitter of birds and the bark of a dog at a nearby farmhouse were the only sounds. A soft breeze stirred the dark hair over Esther's forehead.

"It's so sweet," she breathed, feeling the support of Ralph's arm against her. They continued to sit close together in another long silence. Esther's eyes sought the distant hills.

"Why don't you look at me?" he begged, bringing his face close to hers. "I'm looking at you." He laughed, and her blue eyes met his suddenly. "You're afraid of me," he taunted her, "afraid that I'll make you care. You're as scared—" Again he laughed. "I'd have died — been bored to death if I hadn't known you." She looked down at her feet. "I don't suppose I've made any difference to you."

"A little," she admitted. "I'm often sleepy in the morning." She smiled at him.

"Is that all?" he begged.

"I don't get home as promptly from choir practice as I used to. They — at home — they bother me a little about it." She pulled at her skirt with nervous fingers.

He shifted uneasily. "When are you going to let me call on you, Esther? You said soon. You're

always putting me off. I've got to see you more than twice a week. Doesn't your mother want to see me—the bad man that keeps her good little daughter out late at night?"

"Yes. And you may come soon. My sister's been ill. I told you—the little baby."

"I wouldn't bother her."

"It's made quite a little confusion. We've been busy."

"Well, soon then. You remember. Esther—I—"

Esther climbed up from her hard seat before he could take her hand. The moon had risen high in the sky, shedding a brilliant light over forgetful midnight strollers. "I must get home," Esther said in alarm. "We must walk fast. It's a long way back."

"You'll be sleepy to-morrow," he reminded her.

She took several brisk steps forward. The town clock struck in a monotonous succession. "Don't go so fast," he objected, holding her back. "I won't let you." He held her hand in a tight grip.

"Let me go," she cried. "Sometimes I hate you, Ralph."

"Sometimes I love you, Esther," he answered, releasing her.

She walked on in front of him with breathless haste. Ralph, a little surprised at his own boldness, followed her meekly. They did not speak until they were standing in front of Esther's door.

"Thank you very much, Miss Drew, for allowing me to walk home with you. It's been a great pleas-

ure." Then he seized her arm with boyish abandon. "Let me come soon," he whispered.

She turned to open the door. "Good-night," she said quickly, opening the door and disappearing into the blackness of the hallway.

She tiptoed quietly into her room upstairs, which she shared with Nellie's two boys. They were sleeping quietly and she groped about without a light so that she would not wake them.

Alone in the darkness her face burned feverishly. Ralph had worried her before about coming to her home, and she had always put him off. She could not postpone his coming always. She pressed her hands hard against her throbbing head. No, it was not that she was ashamed of them. Because she loved them all so much, she wanted Ralph to see them at their best. If only Nellie — But fierce loyalty to her sister made her shrink from the thought. And Nellie's children — Those sweet, noisy babies, who upset all orderly household peace. Soon, when Ralph — when trifles made no difference to him — But now, when his love was a daily wonder to her, she must — she would keep it all to herself.

In the morning, Esther, with Billy and Howard tumbling after her, came into the kitchen where her mother, a gaunt figure in gray, was bending over the stove frying pancakes. The smoke from the griddle rose in airy clouds, filling the crowded kitchen with an obscuring mantle. Nellie, nursing her baby nearby, was talking to her.

"Did you hear the baby last night? I didn't get a wink o' sleep hardly. I don't know what was the matter with her."

"Poor Nellie was up most o' the night," Mrs. Drew began in greeting Esther. "After breakfast, I'm goin' to take the baby an' make Nellie go back to bed. It's so nice to-day I can turn the other children out in the back yard to play."

Esther stood in the middle of the kitchen regarding them, with a shadowy smile on her lips and her blue eyes dreamily preoccupied.

Nellie gave her sister a wise look. "You take my advice, Esther. Don't you get married." Nellie laughed, her thin cheeks falling into a myriad of fine lines.

"Oh," Esther exclaimed, clasping her hands behind her. She had it on her tongue to say that all husbands were not like Willis, but she was silent. She pressed her rebellious lips close together. Nellie did not notice Esther's smothered exclamation. She was looking down at her baby, her face shining for an instant with triumphant motherhood. Esther stepped over to her sister and regarded the baby with swiftly moistening lips. Howard and Billy, too, crowded around their small sister, who was still new enough to be a wonder in their awed eyes.

"Ain't she sweet?" Nellie said to them, kissing the baby's head. "Keep your hands away, Billy. Don't lean on mama, Howard, a big boy like you."

Mrs. Drew, seeing the children occupied, whispered to Esther, "Did Mr. Wallace come home from choir practice with you again?" The mother's dull eyes brightened with a spark of excitement.

"Yes," Esther informed her briefly.

Nellie pushed the boys away to hear what Esther was saying. "That new young man's goin' with you pretty steady," she remarked. "I saw him in front o' the bank yesterday when I was goin' by. It's the Farmers' and Merchants' where he works, ain't it? Yes. 'Twas him then. He's handsome sure enough. That'd be quite a catch for you, Esther. He's got real stylish ways. I could see that."

Esther blushed painfully, and began to busy herself making the coffee and arranging the dishes on the table. Taking up the humdrum round of commonplace duties, she still felt the upliftment of the evening before. Her face was like dawn, and she breathed in quick, soft gasps. But none of them noticed. Anna, Nellie's oldest, a demure little girl who had already accepted the responsibilities of the big sister, was sitting on the floor buttoning small Betty's shoes. She stopped a moment to hear what her mother was saying, secure from her elders' observation.

"And we ain't none of us seen him yet," Mrs. Drew reminded her, turning a pancake deftly on the blade of her knife as she spoke. "When's he comin' to the house, Esther?"

Esther smiled. "I don't know," she said.

"Maybe Esther's ashamed of us here," Nellie pouted, holding the baby against her shoulder.

Howard and Billy, tired of their new sister, went back to Aunt Esther. They followed her movements anxiously with solemn, round eyes.

"You have to go to school, Auntie? Then you can't make no gingerbread to-day. An' Granny's too busy."

Billy showed faint symptoms of tears. He was only four. "Be a man, Bill. There." Esther gave him a reassuring pat.

Billy, with yellow hair, big blue eyes like his mother's and cheeks pink and chubby, was Esther's favorite, although she tried to conceal her partiality by an almost Spartan severity at times. She wondered why he was dearer than the others. All five were dear to her. It must be because he had been the baby when Nellie came home to stay. And he was a manly little fellow and had accepted her ministrations instead of his mother's with such flattering cheerfulness when Betty and the unnamed baby, in rapid succession, had usurped his position, that he was Esther's special charge. Then, too, in these last hard years, it had been this silent little child who had seemed to understand her better than any one else. He raised his face for Aunt Esther to kiss him now.

"I'm going to wear my new hair ribbon to school to-day, Auntie," Anna piped up during a brief lull in the childish babble which filled the room. "An' I want you to tie it for me. You get it nicer'n mama does."

"You better sit down now," Mrs. Drew advised Esther as she placed a heaping plate of steaming cakes on the table. "Come, children." The boys scuttled for their chairs.

"I'm glad there's school to-day," Anna volunteered, frowning at the boys who pushed against her. "I don't like to watch the children, Granny."

Nellie sat with the baby in her arms, trying to eat her breakfast. She smiled across at her mother.

"Let me hold her, Nellie. You can't eat that way."

Esther watched her mother take the baby. "Anna isn't ready for school," she said, addressing her sister. "There's not much time."

Nellie glanced at her first-born indifferently. "My, I'll be glad when the children can do for themselves."

Just then, Mr. Drew came in from the barn with a foaming pail of milk, and the children began to crowd around him. They liked warm milk. Billy upset his mother's cup of coffee in the scramble, but he was out of reach before her upraised hand descended on him.

Esther got up from the table. Her face burned with a nervous flush. "You come upstairs with me, Anna."

"I got to find my ribbon, Auntie."

Nellie followed her sister into the hall. "I got a letter from Willis yesterday," Nellie began, avoiding Esther's blue eyes. "He's so homesick. An' now knowin' the baby's come he's that anxious to see her—I wouldn't be a speck surprised if he's skippin' down here."

Esther leaned against the newel-post for support. "Now, Nellie," she began weakly, a sickening dread seizing her, "if you write anything that'll make

Willis give up his job to come here and lie around the way he did all winter — ” Esther’s voice shook.

“ Well, what have I done? ” Nellie’s blond face fell into indignant lines. “ I ain’t wrote nothin’, Esther. But you needn’t get so worked up about it. Willis might get a job here.”

“ He never has. They know him too well.” Esther started up the stairs. Nellie was so soft that Willis could do anything he wanted to with her. It was a waste of energy to talk to Nellie.

Anna ran lightly up the steps behind her.

“ Wash yourself nice and clean in my basin,” Esther admonished, “ and then I’ll brush your hair.”

“ Make my ribbon in a bow that stands straight up, Auntie.”

“ Yes, I know.”

The two started off to school together. Esther knew it was the only way to be sure that Anna got there whole and clean. She sometimes wondered how she would manage when Howard and Billy were old enough to go to school too. She thought of that this morning. Then she stopped suddenly. If she married Ralph — But, no, she would not spoil her happiness by worrying now. If Nellie only had time to keep the children a little cleaner. Esther clutched Anna’s thin little hand more tightly in hers.

“ I’m glad I can go to school,” Anna remarked demurely. “ Ain’t you, Auntie? The children make so much noise. An’ the baby cries all the time. Do you think we needed another baby? We had enough before.”

"Oh, we mustn't say that. They're all welcome after they come," Esther sighed, as they went into the red brick school-house together.

That night, Esther hurried home to iron a white waist. She was going to a picture-show that night with Ralph. She had met him at noon just as she was crossing Main Street. Nellie brought a rocking chair out into the kitchen and sat down near her.

"I'm so glad you're beginning to go out a little, Esther," Nellie said. "It makes me feel like a girl again. I've 'most forgot with five babies comin' so fast."

Esther went on with her task, her wild tumultuous dreams crowded down into the sober drab garments of every day, as she moved her iron with a dexterous, practiced hand.

"Has he said anything yet?" Nellie's face was eager and wistful.

"No." Esther blushed. She finished her waist and then unrolled one of Anna's school dresses.

"Now don't, Esther. You'll be all tired out for to-night and won't look so pretty. You are pretty, Esther. You never looked so pretty as you do now. It's havin' a beau that's done it, I know." Nellie looked up teasingly. "I wish one o' the children could o' had your eyes," she said dreamily. "They're just like wood-violets, Esther."

Esther began to iron Anna's dress. Her peony mouth parted with a lightning flash of rapturous memory. It was Ralph who had said her eyes were like pansies. "Deep blue and like velvet." She remembered his very words. Her eyes had meant

nothing to her until he had praised them. She suddenly remembered that Nellie was beside her and again she bent over her work, pressing her soft red lips together.

"I want Anna to look nice at school," she said, pushing back a damp lock of brown hair. "She's so anxious to be like the other children."

"She's a vain little thing. You spoil her, Esther."

That night, Esther tucked Howard and Billy into their bed beside hers before she got ready to go out with Ralph. When she kissed them good-night, Billy clung to her for a moment. "I'm your baby, ain't I?" he said with a little laugh.

As she stood before the mirror, she caught the two boys sitting up in bed watching her brush out her long shining hair and coil it into a soft mass on her neck. She pretended that she did not see them. When she put on her hat and turned toward them, she found the boys lying with closed eyes. Smiling over their baby deceit, she blew out the light and crept to the door on tiptoe.

Downstairs, she came upon a little group gathered around the table in the sitting room. Her father was smoking, his feet in shabby slippers resting upon a chair in front of him. Her mother was darning yawning chasms in a small stocking, with a heaped-up basket beside her. Nellie, still weak from the last baby, was leaning back in the one comfortable chair the room possessed. Anna, her small face painfully contorted, was making sprawling letters on a crumpled piece of paper. Esther regarded them wistfully. She felt helpless to-night in the

overpowering happiness that enthralled her. She longed to tell some one — her mother — Nellie. But no, she could not. She seated herself near the hall door and waited breathlessly for Ralph's step on the front walk.

In the darkened room of the little theater, Esther sat close to Ralph, his shoulder touching hers. She could smell the tobacco in his clothes. He smoked a curly-stemmed pipe almost incessantly. To her, his tobacco smoke was different from her father's. It was sweet and full of enchantment. The dancing pictures on the screen and the suppressed giggles around her were in another world. She felt Ralph reaching for her hand, and his fingers closed over hers.

"What makes your hands so cold?" he whispered leaning over her.

She was helpless to answer him. Love had come to her with the unerring swiftness of a falling star, and she was still dizzy with the wonder of it. Then the lights were turned on suddenly, and she pulled her hand away. She glanced at him shyly.

He wore a rough gray suit, with immaculate collar and a fastidious necktie of dark green, and his tan shoes were brilliantly polished. His thatch of dark hair was brushed back from his forehead with an elegance unknown to the native youth of Cummingsville, and his brown eyes, full of laughing mischief, were directed upon her.

When the room was in darkness again, she tried to hold herself away from him. Her heart pounded madly and she put her hand up to her throat. She

felt as if she were choking. She had never fainted in her healthy young life, but she had a weak fear of it now.

"You aren't looking at the pictures," he said teasingly. He gave her tense fingers a confidential squeeze. "You funny little girl!"

She was glad when they were outside, and the fresh air revived her. They stood together in front of the shabby cottage where Esther lived, obscured by two apple trees with the branches hanging over the roof. The village street was as deserted as a western plain.

"I'm going to be away," Ralph was telling her. "Going home. To-morrow morning. But I'll be back Sunday night. I'll see you after church."

She leaned against him, forgetting her fear of him. "Until Sunday," she whispered.

"I didn't know it would be so hard to go away from Cummingsville." His arms were about her. Again the world swam in front of Esther, and a sickening nausea made her hide her face against his coat. "Esther, will you kiss me goodbye? Two whole days without you, sweetheart." She raised her head, and he brought his lips close to her face. She hesitated. She had her maidenly scruples. Some of the town girls called her stiff. Their free and easy ways had always been distasteful to her. "I want to feel your lips, little girl." His voice was low and beseeching. His face touched hers, and he kissed her. He held her cheek against his, and would not let her go. He murmured endearments that made her breath come thick and fast. Still he

did not ask her to be his wife. He had something to tell her Sunday night. Then he laughed. He seemed very happy. Perhaps he was going home to consult his parents first. She knew he would do everything right. He was different from other young men she had known. She had held herself aloof from others, but she was giving her love to him.

She went home and tossed in her bed, but she could not sleep. Billy awoke and began to cry. He wanted a drink. She felt her way downstairs, bumping her knee against a chair in the darkness, and stumbled back with the dipper held cautiously in front of her. She was too easy with the children, Nellie said. She could not deny their small baby wants.

Billy drank his water in big gurgles. "I'm scared, Auntie. I want to sleep with you." He began to whimper.

She tucked him in beside her, and held his chubby little hand in hers. "Go to sleep, Billy boy. Auntie's right here holding you tight."

After a while, she heard his gentle breathing. She leaned over and kissed his warm cheek. She wondered if Nellie loved Billy as she did. She couldn't love him more. She hoped that when she and Ralph were married, there wouldn't be any children, at least not very soon. Then, perhaps, she could live close by and run home to help Nellie with her babies. She wouldn't have any money of her own, but she would have more time to make the children's clothes.

"To-morrow's Saturday. I'm going down town and get some striped goods at Buckley's," she planned. "And I'll make a suit for each of the boys. Blue and white, I think. And with collars and cuffs of white. If I make them nice, they'll be pretty enough for Sunday School. Pipe the collar with the blue and white. Or little waists trimmed with the blue, and blue trousers. I've seen them like that. Wide flaring trousers and then their fat little legs—"

She fell asleep in the midst of her dreams. She was up early the next morning, and she went down town as soon as the stores were open. She came back with the blue and striped goods, and some dainty white. She had decided to have the waists white.

She shut herself upstairs to work, and the children heard the whir of the sewing machine all the morning. She had paper patterns to fit the two boys. When she was ready for them, she called Howard and Billy from their play. They were glad to slip off their patched overalls and try on their new clothes. They did not wince when she reached for the scissors and trimmed out the cloth around the neck. They stood very still when she put in the pins. When she took off the suits and began to baste with careful precision, they danced up and down in their joy. They planted muddy kisses on their aunt's cheek and ran off to play again so that they would not be in her way. They were good little boys, and they obeyed her better than any one else.

Nellie came up before dinner to see how Esther was getting along. She examined the garments, her mouth curved in a smile.

"You're a wonder with your needle, Esther. You planning to get them done by to-night? You'll be all tired out."

"I want the boys to wear them to Sunday School to-morrow," Esther stopped to say.

"They'll look sweet. I'll go down town and see if I can get some little duck hats for 'em. They're cheap."

Esther's mother came up to help her late in the afternoon. She made all the button holes. There were a good many the way little boys' suits were made. The trousers were fastened to the waist with big pearl buttons, and there were eight button holes for each. Then there were those down the front of the waists. Mrs. Drew made beautiful buttonholes, and she was proud of her skill.

That night, the suits were all pressed and ready to wear. When the boys went to bed, they wanted their new clothes hung over a chair so that they could see them the first thing in the morning. Esther laughed, but she did what they wanted.

She went to Sunday School the next morning, with one boy holding tight to each hand, and Anna walking sedately beside them. Anna wore a white dress Esther had made for her last summer out of one of her old ones. The boys stepped along very carefully in their elegant suits. When a tiny breeze stirred, they clutched their new hats with an anxious hand. They were such pretty children. When they

entered the church, the minister shook hands with all of them.

"These dear little children," he said. "They're a credit to you, Miss Esther." He knew who it was that bore the brunt of Nellie's young family.

Esther felt a lump in her throat as she conducted the boys to their classes. She took charge of their hats. They wanted her to take them.

"The big boys might snatch 'em," they told her.

That night, she hurried off to church before the children were in bed. She had sung in the church choir for three years now, and it had been almost her only recreation. She sang alto, and she had a low, sweet voice with a touching melancholy in some of her tones that made old ladies wipe their eyes when Esther sang a solo. She had sung beautifully on Easter. Many still complimented her although Easter was more than a month past.

Ralph sang bass, and he sat next to Esther. He was quite an addition to the choir. But he was late to-night. The bell had stopped ringing and they had to wait a few minutes before they took their seats back of the pulpit. Esther did not dare to look at him when he did come.

During the sermon, her thoughts were far away. The lights grew blurred in front of her, and the slender evening congregation, prim old ladies in rusty black bonnets, sleepy old men, deaf Mr. Hood in the front pew holding his ear with his hand, giggling boys and girls in the rear of the church, floated before her like a mirage. Soon the service would be over, and she and Ralph would be out in the night

together. He had something to tell her. Her thoughts beat in a rapturous tune. She knew what he wanted to say.

Unconsciously, her eyes travelled to Ralph's face, but he was staring straight in front of him. Something in the arrogant tilt of his head and the coldness of his dark eyes startled her. He was so faultless. His neat appearance was delightful to her; and yet — his neck looked a little stiff behind his close-fitting collar, and the perfection of his tie awed her. The snowy edge of a linen handkerchief peeped at a precise distance above his coat pocket. Esther sat erect in her chair, her eyes round and frightened. A picture of the family at home came rushing before her sight. She saw them sitting around the living room table the way she had left them when she hurried away to church that evening. Then some stray fancy hurled Ralph suddenly among them. She moved in her seat, cold perspiration making her hair cling to her forehead in wet strands. Her gloves felt moist and clammy. A protecting love had made her keep Ralph away from them. She had wanted him to see them at their best, her father and mother and Nellie and the babies. But — They couldn't always be at their best. It wasn't often that they were. But she loved them. She didn't care if —

When she rose to sing the last hymn, her book shook in her hand and she held it tight against her. It was only by an exercise of will that her voice rang out clear and true. At last, the benediction was spoken, and Esther and Ralph were hurrying away

from the group of people who stood at the church door.

Esther breathed hard and fast. She stopped at the first corner. "I want you to go home with me, Ralph," she gasped suddenly. "I want you to meet my family."

"All right, but let's get a breath of air first."

"I'll walk with you afterward." She did not dare to trust her resolve.

On the way, she lagged, her courage failing her. If some invisible voice could only warn them that Ralph was coming, or if she could go on ahead of Ralph and let them know. They were in sight of the house now. "Oh, God," Esther prayed, "have Nellie and the children in bed this time."

Esther rang the bell, waited a moment and walked in. "It's only me," she called, "and Mr. Wallace." She heard a scamper of children's feet. The children were not in bed. Her prayer was unanswered.

Two blond heads peeked out from the sitting room door. "It's Aunt Esther," Billy and Howard shouted together. They rushed upon her, squealing like the young barbarians they knew how to be.

"Boys," sounded Nellie's high, fretful voice.

The boys were unused to callers. They did not understand that Aunt Esther did not want to be clutched with their grimy little hands. Ralph Wallace stumbled into the Drew living room behind the two boys, who were scuffling and pushing each other. Howard gave Billy a brotherly thump which sent the younger boy whimpering to his mother.

Esther's father rose clumsily, staring at the stranger over his glasses. His crumpled hair stood erect like a threatening cloud over his weather-beaten face. Mrs. Drew pushed her chair forward for the young man. Nellie giggled when her sister's beau was presented to her. "I told Esther I guessed she was ashamed of us, never bringin' you home with her," she said with a coquettish glance. She smoothed back her hair, and pulled at her skirt. Howard and Billy stood in front of the newcomer and examined him critically.

"Did you bring us some candy?" Billy asked, to break the silence that followed his mother's overture.

"Why Billy, dear!" Esther's voice showed a trace of tears.

Esther had replaced Billy's new suit with the overalls of every day, and he wore a tattered blouse. Traces of the bread and milk he had eaten for supper hovered over his upper lip.

"Billy, you naughty boy!" scolded Nellie. "It's time you children were in bed. Where's Howard?" Howard, hidden behind the stove, peered out warily. Nellie caught Billy by one ragged sleeve. He pulled away and screwed his mouth into a dangerous pout. Then scampering over to his aunt, he hid his face in her skirt.

"I don't want to go to bed," he wailed, kicking his shoes together.

Esther bent over and whispered something to him. He listened patiently. She rose and motioned to

Howard. "Come, Howard," she called. "Billy wants you to go to bed with him."

"I hadn't the strength to get the boys to bed," Nellie explained when Esther had gone. "They fight against it so. Esther's been taking charge of the boys since the baby came."

"And before," interposed Mr. Drew.

"They mind her better'n me," Nellie went on. "Boys are a big job, I think."

"Yes, they are," Ralph assented politely.

"Esther takes the weight of everything," her father complained, puffing fiercely at his pipe.

"I'm sure it'll be hard to get along without her," Nellie added, giving Ralph a knowing glance, "but I s'pose we'll have to some day."

Ralph, very red, looked away. Mrs. Drew had said nothing. She sat dumb and miserable, twisting her worn hands together. "How d'you like Cummingsville?" she asked in desperation.

Ralph turned to her in relief. "Perhaps I'll like it better when I've been here longer. I've never been in such a small town," he added condescendingly.

"There's worse places," put in Mr. Drew scowling. He put his pipe down on the table and glanced at the clock, yawning. Mrs. Drew gave him a warning tap with her foot.

Anna came out from behind Ralph's chair. She hung over him now, touching his sleeves with her scrawny little hands. She did not need encouragement. She perched herself on his knee and rubbed a smutty finger over his immaculate linen collar.

"Anna's a regular little flirt," Nellie simpered. Upstairs, Esther was hurrying Howard and Billy into bed.

"Howard hit me," wept Billy sleepily as Esther undressed him.

"Who's that man?" inquired Howard as he wrestled with a tangle in his shoe lace. "What's he comin' here for?" Howard's voice was jealously anxious.

"Howard, you must kiss Billy and tell him you're sorry. You were a naughty boy."

Howard came up to his brother and caressed him lovingly. Then Billy wanted Aunt Esther to kiss him. He put his arms so tight around her that she cried out in pain. "I 'most smothered you," boasted Billy. "That's 'cause I love you so hard."

Esther clung to him. He was beautiful to her with his ragged clothes and dirty mouth. "My adorable boy!" she crooned.

When Esther returned to the living room, Anna's arm hung over Ralph's stiffened shoulder. "Anna," called Esther, "come to bed." Anna jumped from her seat. "Go up very quietly, Anna," Esther warned.

"Yes, Auntie," Anna promised.

She kissed all the members of the family. "I want to kiss him too," she said, pointing to Ralph and looking at her aunt for permission. Nellie laughed. Anna pressed her sticky lips vigorously against Ralph's. "I don't believe he likes to have little girls kiss him," she complained, drawing away. Ralph smoothed back his hair and laughed rather

ruefully, while Anna with a crestfallen glance tiptoed out of the room.

"You ain't used to children, Mr. Wallace. I can tell the way you act with 'em," Nellie remarked sagely. "You'll have to take lessons from Esther. It's her that ought to have the children instead of me."

"Esther puts the children ahead o' everything." Mrs. Drew spoke up suddenly, her drooping mouth twitching with sudden emotion.

Esther had not been listening to what they were saying. She suddenly realized that her father was started on a vigorous tirade. He pounded the table with a calloused fist, and raised his voice ominously. She had heard him before on the same subject and she shivered. Her father, who was so sweet and gentle in bearing all his misfortunes, had one grievance, the wrongs of the laboring man and the insolent tyranny of capital. He was all scorn when he spoke of a white-collar job, and he glared at his opponent with ill-disguised hostility. Esther tried to stop him but he went on and on.

In a brief lull, Esther rose. "Mr. Wallace and I are going for a little walk," she explained. Ralph reached for his hat hurriedly.

"We'll finish some other time, Mr. Drew," the young man said amiably. Mr. Drew only grunted.

When they were outside, Ralph walked so fast that Esther found it difficult to keep up with him. Again they started toward the river.

"You wear yourself out with those kids," Ralph remarked crossly, slowing up a little. "You act as if they were yours."

"I sometimes feel as if they were mine."

"They kick up an awful rumpus. Ought to be held down more. That boy — the little chap —"

"Billy?" Esther's eyes shone.

"He's spoiled."

The girl held her breath. "Billy — Billy spoiled? Oh, no."

"I don't want you — you oughtn't — They're your sister's children."

"They've been my life."

"What?" Esther spoke so low that at first Ralph did not understand. "But they aren't any more?" Ralph stopped and looked at her.

Esther regarded him with a steadfast, sorrowful glance. Then she smiled. The shadows of the night could not obscure the beauty of the smile that hovered over her lips. It was like the triumphant song of Niobe over her children or Cornelia's dreams of the future of her two sons.

"They will always be a big part of it," she announced, her voice ringing like a bell. As she said these words, it seemed to her that a filmy curtain dropped down noiselessly between her and Ralph. She continued to smile although she swayed a little, and she no longer looked up into Ralph's face.

"You can't hang over them forever. If — when —" He paused. "Some one ought to get you away from it. I won't stay in Cummingsville long. This beastly hole. I want to get as far away as I can."

They stood on the bridge, Ralph leaning against a heavy support.

"I've got something to tell you," he began again, stumbling over the words. "I ought to have told you before but — That's what I went away for — It was — I've always known her. Her father lent me the money to go to school. And I — I was only a boy. She was older — But she — We were both too young to know. And I — She didn't change. She said she never would — There was no one else then — But I went to tell her that I —"

He was looking away from her, down at the silent river which lay below bathed in dark shadows. The hills on the opposite side of the river closed in upon them with menacing gloom. Esther caught her breath.

"You know I was mad about you, Esther," he said in a hoarse whisper, "mad about you from the first."

"No," Esther said, "I didn't know."

"She'd give me up if I asked her."

Esther put out her hand. "You're engaged to some other girl?" she inquired sadly.

"Well —"

"And you kissed me." She hid her face in her hands, the light of the moon shamelessly exposing her disgrace.

"Good God, Esther! I loved you. I couldn't — I couldn't help myself."

"And you — you wanted to make me love you when you —"

"But you didn't love me." He turned upon her savagely. "I always knew it. You made me — you danced me along on a string — you —"

She faced him defiantly. "Don't—don't say such things."

"You don't love me," he repeated. "You love those—those children better— You can't deny it. You said yourself you'd have to stick to them. You meant that? You'd sacrifice me—you'd stay here and—" He stood close beside her, pulling at her arm.

She drew herself away proudly. "When I—when I let you—you kiss me, then I loved you, Ralph," she said softly. "Would I— But you're right. Maybe—even before—before tonight—I loved them best. They were all I had for so long." Again she smiled, as one does, who can calmly look upon what is already dead. "If you had been free to marry me—and we had loved each other—I—I'd have—I should have—I'd have married you. But I'd never have given them up. I'd have stripped myself—not you, I hope—but I might. You'd have—I wouldn't be—I wouldn't go away—this beastly hole—I wouldn't be able to keep you from being bored then. It wouldn't be right—to sacrifice you too." She felt sorry for him tonight. Her voice was very gentle. Perhaps tomorrow or the next day she would be sorry for herself, but now she thought only of him.

"They need me the most," she went on. "They're so small and helpless and they've come to look to me." He looked ahead of him sulkily. "It's all for the best that you—that you belong to some one else. And perhaps you love her better than you think now."

"I don't love her. I'd have told her so if — she wasn't very well. Her father told me. It was because — I knew I didn't care enough that I went away from her." He coughed and cleared his throat. "Her father has the bank at home. He wanted me —" Unconsciously Ralph lifted his head proudly. "He'd make it pay me to come back, he said. It would be a big chance."

Esther stood without speaking. Her moment of exaltation was going, but she was deathly calm. A freezing chill had settled upon her, and she closed her mouth tight to keep her teeth from chattering. She was thinking of the other girl — the girl to whom Ralph was engaged.

"I didn't know," she told herself, "I didn't know that I was taking something away from her."

Ralph leaned over the bridge waiting for Esther to speak, but she stood there silently regarding him. Words were impossible when the foundations of life were tottering under her feet. They lingered there for a long time, united in their misery but separated now in everything else.

"I'm going away," he said at last. "Going very soon. I might as well. If you — if as you said — it's the best thing — you — I —"

"Yes," she agreed.

"You'll forget me." His voice was bitter.

"Yes," she said quietly, "I'll forget you — sometime."

They walked back toward town. She hesitated at the door and tried to speak. "Goodbye," she said, taking his hand. "Goodbye, and all happiness. I

want you to have it and I — Go back to her. She loves you."

His face twitched with pain. He leaned over and kissed her hand. "You forgive me?" he asked.

"You didn't mean to — to hurt me," she faltered and passed quickly into the house.

The boys were asleep. Feeling her way across the room, she stumbled over a chair and felt something soft in her hand. It was the suits the boys still gloried over. She straightened them over the back of the chair.

Esther lay all night with her face buried in tightly locked arms. "If I could only go on loving him," she moaned aloud. Then she remembered the sleeping children, and she choked back the agony which tried to escape her. He was less fine than she had thought. And still she would not have wished to spoil his life. The hard choking sobs that racked her were for a love which might have been. She saw Ralph's future plainly. It would be more comfortable than hers. She was in the dark about herself. But there were the children. Every day — their persistent wants — dulling her ache — helping her to forget —

In the morning, very early, her mother stole into the room. Her face was furrowed and care-worn.

"Willis come back last night," she announced, avoiding Esther's miserable blue eyes. "Esther, please don't say nothin' to Nellie. He was so lonesome for her and the children he couldn't stand it bein' away. An' Nellie was so happy. She says it's like when they was first married." Mrs. Drew

sighed. "You mustn't make it hard for Nellie," she said.

Esther rubbed her hands over her eyes. "No, I won't," she promised.

"Willis thinks the baby looks like him."

"Does he?"

"Maybe he'll get a job around here, Esther. We'll hope for the best." Mrs. Drew looked at her daughter stealthily. "I heard you come home last night. Did he—"

Esther regarded her mother sternly. "He's going away," she said with heroic firmness. "He told me last night." She brought her lips together into a hard white line. "He's going to be married. Some one he's always known."

Mrs. Drew dropped down on the bed. "Then he an' you—you ain't—"

"No, I'm going to teach school forever. Forever and ever." Esther's lovely eyes gazed wearily into an unending future.

Her mother rolled her apron in her thin work-worn fingers. "Esther, I wouldn't a said a word if you'd married him. But now—Nellie was cryin' last night after Willis come. She said she didn't know what was comin' to her. Willis out of a job again an' five children. An' your father gettin' older all the time and crippled with rheumatism most o' the winter. Nellie said if you got married—the childern dependin' on you so an' you so good to 'em. Poor Nellie! She's had an awful hard time, Esther."

"Yes," Esther said, keeping the bitterness out of her voice, "yes, she has."

"I wouldn't 'a said a word," her mother repeated, "but if you ain't goin' to marry him I can't help but feel kind o' glad for Nellie and her childern."

The boys were awake. Billy, a young cherub in his white night clothes, scampered over to Esther's bed. He nestled down beside her, kissing her, his two hands clutching her face. "Auntie, Auntie," he said, "I love you. You're so nice. An' you're so good to me an' Howard." He sat up in bed and looked at her. "Why, you're cryin', Aunt Esther. The rain's all comin' out o' your eyes." He kissed her again. "I'm all your boy, Auntie," he whispered, putting his arms tight around her. "All yours an' not a speck anybody else's."

"Yes, Billy boy. You're my boy. I've got you." She kissed him again. "My own boy."

The Gracious Veil

By TARLETON COLLIER

Mrs. Tucker entered the dining room and began groping on the mantel for the matches. In a chair near the window, almost obscured in the twilight, a figure stirred heavily and mumbled several words in a toothless, stiff-tongued sort of voice.

Mrs. Tucker's fumbling ceased; her hand remained for a moment poised above the litter of articles on the mantel, and her head drooped to one side, as if she were seeking the echoes of those clumsy sounds.

"What's that, honey?" she asked. Then her little laugh expressed a belated comprehension. "Oh! . . . Your old ma's gettin' deaf, I reckon . . . It's nearly six o'clock, honey."

She crossed the room and shifted and patted a pillow beneath the head of a girl who sat in the chair; then she stooped and touched her lips lightly to her daughter's forehead, smoothing back the hair as she did so.

"There, there, honey; don't fret," she said. "You're hot. You jest set quiet a little while, and then —"

"It's been long . . . today . . ." The girl's words, although still thick and somewhat blurred, were rather more distinct, being high and querulous with complaint. The girl lifted her hand by a series of short, imprecise jerks. Once or twice her fingers closed upon nothing, and then clutched tightly her mother's arm.

Her other hand was gnarled, grotesquely bent forward at the wrist, its fingers curled and stiff. The shriveled arm was crooked at the elbow and rigidly fixed across the girl's chest, so that the hand seemed always half raised.

"There, there," the woman crooned, stooping once more to kiss her daughter's forehead. "There, there, Bethie; we'll go out as soon as . . . "

She did not finish, except with a little gesture toward the window, the token of a perfect understanding between the two of them. The girl's face, gaunt and pallid, with the chin fallen, was suddenly distorted and there came a formless sound from the lips. Bethie was trying to laugh.

Mrs. Tucker turned her face aside, and then left her daughter abruptly, tearing her arm from the girl's grasp; she went out of the room, slamming shut the door behind her.

Bethie dropped her head against the pillow. On the sidewalk a boy passed, whistling and clacking a stick against the iron fence. An automobile, lurching over the uneven pavement, went past slowly, as if groping its way through the dusk, to a ceaseless shrill grating of its siren. Within the house, coming from the next room, there was the occasional clatter of pots and pans, as Bethie's mother moved about the kitchen. The girl might have been deaf, for any impression the sounds seemed to make upon her.

Only once was there from her a flash of life. With a sudden blink a street light flared into brilliance, leaping out of the darkness like a magic moon. Athwart the window, the lamp darted a shaft of light into the dining room. Bethie lifted her head from the pillow and sat almost erect; the movement brought her face into the light, and she dropped back quickly.

Soon afterward Mrs. Tucker entered, in one hand a plate of bread, which she laid upon the table.

"It's night," Bethie said, speaking in hardly more than a whisper. There was a quality of passion in the clumsy utterance. Her mother went to her side.

"Yes, dear, yes," said Mrs. Tucker, as if to a small child. "And it's fine out, too . . . Now I'm goin' to light the gas. Watch out!"

At the crackle of the match, Bethie closed her eyes; with a little puff the gas blazed into light; in

a blinding flash the gloom of the chamber was gone. The girl seemed smaller than ever, shrinking into the depths of her chair, with that in her eyes which was weariness and fright and appeal.

"Oh! . . . supper! . . ." A cry, heavy with tragic disappointment.

"There, dearie . . . All right." Mrs. Tucker lightly patted her daughter's hand, lingering for a little while beside the chair; then she went about her task, setting the table with an ease and swiftness that was art. Back and forth from dining room to kitchen she passed several times, upon each return bringing to the table a steaming dish. The meal ready, she wheeled Bethie's chair to the table, and went out into the hall and called shrilly, "Oh, Pa!" A scuff-scuff on the stairs heralded the descent of Mr. Tucker, who appeared in the door a moment later, a gray, unkempt, but good-natured person, still smoking a somewhat battered pipe; he wore no coat nor collar, and a soiled shirt was revealed where his vest, unbuttoned, hung apart in front. His feet were partly covered by a pair of carpet slippers, much too large, that scraped the floor as he walked.

"Dinner's on the table, pa," said Mrs. Tucker. "You don't mind eatin' by yourself, do you?"

Mr. Tucker's mild eyes widened forlornly. "What — ?"

"Don't scold, pa," his wife wheedled. "We don't want to wait. We can eat, . . . any time."

Without another word the old man sat down to the meal. He seemed strangely timid and self-conscious, keeping his eyes on his plate with an effort

that was too plain, like a boy embarrassed by his own compassion. Mrs. Tucker fetched a shawl for Bethie, and helped the girl to her feet.

Bethie tottered and would have fallen forward but for her mother's arm about her shoulder. Her body sprawled loosely and her legs jerked and twisted in a crazy, zigzag course. She leaned heavily upon her mother as the two passed out into the night.

It was a warm summer evening, heavy with odors, and very dark. Against the black velvet of the sky the stars were large and bright; not far above the housetops the delicate thread of the new moon shone; and a little breeze stirred.

Passing through the gate to the sidewalk, the girl paused and took two or three long breaths. As if to greet her, the breeze at that moment freshened with a puff, lifting the coarse strand of hair that straggled across her forehead. Bethie threw back her head, and gazed upward.

"Come on," whispered Mrs. Tucker, and they moved slowly along the sidewalk, the girl's feet dragging. Once more the breeze freshened for a moment, laving the face of mother and daughter with coolness, carrying to them its manifold burden of odors. Once more the girl paused and flung back her head; down upon her the stars darted fire of many colors. . . .

Suddenly there came from her an inarticulate whimper, and a guttural sound, as of an animal. A sob seemed nearly to choke her, then burst forth harshly.

"There, there," her mother sought to soothe her.
"Don't cry, honey; don't . . . "

"It's — it's so pretty," whispered the girl, her eyes seeking the stars.

Mrs. Tucker stroked her daughter's arm, silently.

"Why does it ever have to be — day?" The girl's thick voice was low, with a note of passion.

"There, there, Bethie! . . . "

After a while they went on again; a man and a woman passed them, walking slowly and talking in whispers, like sweethearts. The girl huddled closer on her mother's arm, but the man and woman had no eyes for anything.

At a cross street an electric arc was hung and sputtered, casting a circle of light that was like sunshine. Almost imperceptible, a tremor passed through the girl's frame; and she stopped short, as a boy entered the zone of white light, coming from the other side of the street. She drew back, turning her mother half around as she did so; and thereby found a hiding place as the boy passed. And then they went on again, more rapidly as they entered the lighted circle . . .

Some distance farther on there came a light patter of footsteps. A child perhaps three years old ran from a yard as they moved past. Bravely confident he stepped before them and looked up at them.

"Hello," he said, shrill and friendly.

The girl laughed, a formless, grating sound. The child peered up into her face; but it was very dark, there beneath the trees. The night was like a kindly veil . . .

Bethie placed a hand upon his curls, and, reaching up, he grasped one of her fingers with the utmost of his little strength, in the marvelous faith of babyhood that all things are good and beautiful . . .

The Penitent

By WEARE HOLBROOK

He is growing old. For a year he has had the responsibility of Baths, and now she has conferred upon him the responsibility of Prayer. She still fills the tub and puts out the polar-bear towel on bath night, but for a week he has not knelt down to say "Our Father who art in Heaven"—and no one has known the difference. Soon he will reach other responsibilities,—those of Staying Up Late, of Dollars, of Travel Alone. He is growing old rapidly; strange that she should remain always the same!

She tucks him into bed; she has done that ever since he slept in the little one with the fence around it. After she has given the covers a final pat, he knows that she will lean over and kiss him good-night.

Long ago he learned that kisses are things to be endured; even those of strange moist women must not be rubbed away. But when she kisses him he doesn't mind,—he would rather have her than not. She has her own particular place; one must brush his hair back ever to find it. She always waits for a moment afterward, her face close to his. Some-

times he thinks that she is going to speak to him, but she only waits. He wishes that she would speak; he wants to hug her tight and tell her that he loves her, but something interferes. It seems rather late in life to begin acting affectionate. If he had begun earlier, it would be easy now, but he fears that she might think he is pretending, as little girls pretend when people are watching them.

"'Night,'" he calls, as she walks slowly down the stair. He should have said more than that; he wanted to put his arms around her when she was there beside him, but the parlor-feeling held him back. Now it is too late; she has gone.

True, there will be other nights, but they will be like the ones that have been. Things will go on until some night she will tuck him in, and it will have to be for the last time; she will die, thinking he cares no more for her than he appears to. And then he can't call her back to tell her the truth. Perhaps she waits that moment beside his bed, in hope; perhaps when she is by herself she cries, and it is all his fault.

She may die before he ever sees her again. He has been a wretch! Not another night will go without his telling her how much he loves her,—no, not even this night. She must know; lonely and disappointed, she is probably thinking about him now.

He slips out of bed quietly, and walks with little steps toward the sliver of light under the door. The bare floor is cold — it makes his toes turn up — but the hall rug feels like a live animal.

At the head of the stairs he stops to listen. She is talking.

"Would you believe it? — Nina actually had the audacity to tell me that she paid twenty-six for it, and I saw the identical thing at Altman's for eleven-fifty!"

He doesn't know what she is talking about, but somehow he is relieved. Downstairs, they are still laughing when he climbs back into bed. He laughs, too; the bed is as warm as when he left it.

The Gypsy

By ALICE PINIFER

Summer is going,
Her tents are down,
Her fields are harvested
Bare and brown.

Her herds are gathered,
Her wild flocks gone:
What subtle warning
In the cold dawn?

Far back, the first
Unrest began;
Now streams her scarlet
Caravan.

Two Poems

By RICHARD WARNER BOEST

APRIL SHOWERS

What loveliness to see above the plain
The cloudy chariots of the storm assemble!
What solemn awe to feel the air a-tremble
When the far thunders faintly warn of rain!
See, yonder, that gray curtain, silvery lighted
As by a thousand candles from within,
Move slowly o'er the uplands where the thin
And pallid blades are waiting unaffrighted.

Soon, now, how soon, the sun appears in splendor,
And dripping leaves and spreading pools a-shine
Their lambent lights in rainbow hues combine
Pouring through all a mellow glow and tender,
Until the air its magic spell distills
In deeper green to clothe the happy hills.

IN A CATHEDRAL

How dim, how solitary, yet withal how proud,
These cloistered aisles, these carvèd choirs ap-
pear,—
Authority entrenched in treasured gear
Of ages gone! Behold yon spiral cloud
Of heavy incense whirled in smoky wraith:
So drifts, amid his works, man's restless faith.

A Man's Reach

By CLARA F. MCINTYRE

When I first saw Mildred, we met on the conventional terms of big boy and little girl cousin. She was being scolded for getting jam on her best white frock, and I, from the height of my sixteen years, looked on and decided that children were disgusting little pigs. I was a trifle interested, though, in the fact that the scolding, and even the shakes that accompanied it, left her serenity undisturbed.

I suppose I saw her a few times in the years that followed. I must have seen her, for we had family reunions at which the most distant relatives were called from their comfortable indifference to pose as intimate friends. In fact, I have an indistinct memory of a thin, active child, with a long, light-brown braid usually coming unbraided. But in those days school and university were the real things, and family ties held lightly.

The first time that I really, one might say, saw her, was when I went to the house in response to a summons from her mother. Cousin Olivia was rather ineffectual in business matters, and always turned trustfully to the men of the family, even to the farthest removes. Having lately rediscovered me, she fixed upon me as a new adviser.

It was an April day, with a partly cloudy sky and a little soft, teasing wind. As I came up the drive, Mildred was standing in front of the house, talking

to Roger Wayne. Roger was on horseback, and she was absentmindedly stroking the horse's neck as she looked up at his rider. I stopped a minute and studied the picture they made, for neither one of them noticed me. I had dabbled somewhat in art, as I have dabbled in so many things, and I thought the whole thing "composed" wonderfully. Mildred was wearing a white skirt and a long, straight smock of a dull green that fitted into the greens and grays and blues of the day. Her hair was blowing about her face, and she lifted one hand to hold it back, while the other rested on the glossy blackness of the horse's neck. Roger, bending a little down toward her, was full of strength and vigor. The dull tan of his riding-suit, and his fair, uncovered head, blended harmoniously with the other soft tones. I named the picture to myself, Youth and Spring, and wished I had the skill to paint it. As I got a nearer view of their faces, however, the purely artistic attitude changed, and I sighed a little. Mildred could not have been more than seventeen, Roger, perhaps, twenty-one, but somehow I felt that look had come to stay.

It was chance or fate, I suppose, that I first looked at Mildred with seeing eyes, after the great jolt of my life. Not many weeks before, I had been riding in a fox hunt with Axley James, one of my chums in university days. There was some hard riding, and my mount, a new one which Axley gave me only under protest, took every bit of strength and skill that I possessed. Just as we dismounted at the end

of the hunt, I disgraced myself by toppling over into a dead faint. By luck, Axley's uncle, one of the best physicians in London, happened to be at the house. He punched and prodded me all over, when I had got back strength enough for the performance, and finally gave me some interesting information. I was not to ride any more — was not, in fact, to take any exercise which was exhausting or fatiguing. There was something seriously wrong with the heart; he gave it to me in high-sounding Latin terms. There was no reason why, with care, I should not have a reasonably long life; he quoted my uncle Osborne, who had lived to the age of seventy-three. But the thought of Uncle Osborne's long existence, whose only object seemed the painstaking care of himself, was a wet blanket to hope and courage.

We have an instinct to live, though, however humiliating the conditions. So I had obeyed the doctor, and given up most of the things which make life worth while. Strange as it may seem, it was something of a relief when I looked at Mildred, with her straight, slim figure, and her pale brown hair blowing about her face, and her gray eyes full of eager light, to know that she was already beyond my reach. For I had made up my mind that it would not be right to tie any woman to an uncertainty like myself.

In the next few years I went pretty often to Cousin Olivia's. She had come to rely upon me more than on some of the others, partly because I had more time to listen to her difficulties and to straighten them out for her. Most of my intimates had

gradually found out that there was a reason why I could not do the things that I had set out to do, and after some attempts to express sympathy, they had ended by accepting me without question as a comfortable dilettante. The doctor had shaken his head when I broached my political aspirations.

"Too exciting, I'm afraid. You used to be interested in writing, Alix. Why don't you go into that?"

So I sat at home in my library and mulled over books, and now and then gave Fate a hearty curse, but for the most part got along fairly well with the shadows of things.

With the war came my sharpest time of rebellion. I tried two examiners, with the hope of slipping through, but found them both too shrewd for me. So I settled down, reluctantly, to the tamer work that a civilian might undertake.

I took Mildred down, one night in the early fall, to see Roger leave. Only a few weeks before, it had been agreed that they were to be married the next spring, and he still said, gaily, that the war would be over by that time, and they could carry out their plans. Mildred kept up bravely while we were in the station. When she waved good-by to Roger, her eyes shone, and her whole face was brilliant with enthusiasm. But on the way home in the cab she collapsed, and sobbed against my arm. I tried to reassure her, but my own heart was heavy. Somehow, in the bustle and excitement of the leavetakings, there had come home to me for the first time the hideousness of this thing with which we were entangled, the wanton waste of training up men like Roger for such a purpose.

Sometimes I think I must have had a presentiment of what was to come. At any rate, I felt no surprise when I heard that Roger was dead. It seemed an inevitable, inescapable thing. When I first saw Mildred, she tried to put the same feeling into words.

"They say," she said, "that people often can't believe their friends are dead, even when they have seen them. They keep expecting to have them come in, to find out it was all a mistake. I haven't felt that for a moment. I knew right away that it was true, and that it *had to be* true—that everything was over. The whole world seems so empty, Alix. There's nothing in it but pain—and I can't feel even that. I can only wonder how Roger and I dared to be happy."

She looked so white and thin in her black dress, that I was startled. More than the whiteness and thinness, her apathy worried me. She seemed passive, utterly indifferent to everything around her. I began to wonder what could possibly be done to arouse her.

When I went again, about two weeks later, Charlotte, the younger sister, met me in the hall and drew me into the sitting-room.

"Oh, Alix," she began impetuously, "I'm so glad you have come. We are terribly worried over Mildred."

"What's the matter?" I asked in alarm. "Is she ill?"

"No, it's the strange idea she's taken. Mamma is so troubled over it, she has gone to bed. You know how things upset her! But Mildred's determined to do it."

"Do what?" My mind sought anxiously for possibilities.

"She wants to marry a crippled soldier."

"Marry!" I was still blank as to the meaning of the situation.

"Yes. Advertise, you know. For a man so badly crippled, he'll have to be taken care of the rest of his life. She wants to do it because she can't do it for Roger. You must make her see she can't!"

It was clear to me now. In my first wild guessing I had thought of Red Cross service or of a nunnery, but I realized that I had not fully known Mildred, to hit upon such obvious things. It would take a rarer sort of quixotism to appeal to her.

When she came in, I was struck by the change in her. She was still pale and grief-stricken, but there was a flame of excitement in her white face, an energy that had been lacking before. I did my best, as gently as I could, to show her that what she was proposing was too visionary to succeed, to urge her into some more usual form of service; but she was firm.

"I heard last week of a French girl who did it," she said, "and I knew at once that it was what I must do, what I was meant to do. It is the only thing that will satisfy me, that will reconcile me to living at all, if I can do for some other man what I might have done for Roger."

Guardedly I tried to make her see some of the dangers and difficulties of the plan.

"Have you any idea, Mildred," I asked, "what it would mean to be married to a man for whom you felt only pity?"

She lifted her head proudly, with a look of almost mystical exaltation.

"I am *married* to Roger," she said. "This man would be just his substitute on earth. Just the means of letting me pour out the devotion that I would have given Roger, that I want to give to the country he died for."

All my arguing was useless; she stuck fast to her purpose. A queer little twist in her mind had made her see the romantic self-sacrifice of this sort of devotion. Oddly enough, I reflected, it was in line with a purely scientific article I had read a few days before, recommending, as one way of dealing with the economic situation, marriage of the men who came home physically wrecked by the war, with women who had lost their lovers or husbands, and so were ready to marry for duty and not for romance.

It would have seemed sacrilege to say to Mildred, in the first exaltation of suffering for her loss, that time does unexpected things; that she was young to be so sure of her feeling for the rest of her life. I could only determine to stand by her, in the hope that when it really came to the point, she might change her mind. One thing I asked her — to let me receive the answers that came to her advertisement and read them first. In that way I could save her looking over the unsatisfactory ones, and, as a man,

I could probably judge better of other men's letters. She agreed, gratefully; I could see that, though the situation itself, in its ideal qualities, attracted her, she shrank from the practical details.

The letters that came in were most of them, as I had anticipated, out of the question. I was half inclined, at first, to let Mildred read them all, in the hope that she would be disillusioned at once. But her feeling about the thing was really so fine, I had not the heart to shock her out of it too harshly. Besides, I was afraid of the effect. Until this idea came to her, she had had no interest in life at all. What would become of her if it were taken away? So I read the letters with care, but one after another was laid on the unsatisfactory pile. Some were illiterate, written on coarse and even dirty paper. Some showed plainly a common and ugly greed. Some were pathetic in the details they gave; but showed no understanding of the spirit of the offer. Some were vulgarly jocose or fulsomely sentimental. At last, on the third day, at the bottom of a dozen or so, I came to an envelope which attracted me. It was large and gray, and the handwriting of the address was clear and markedly individual. As I read the enclosure, my feeling grew that for the first time I had someone worthy of consideration.

The writer stated his position simply and briefly. He had been crippled in the war, to such an extent that he was useless for any active life. He had some property, so should not be dependent upon anyone for support. He was alone in the world, and the

offer of companionship was attractive to him. If the lady wished to carry the matter further, he should be glad to talk it over with her or with anyone representing her. The letter was signed Alton Granger, and in parenthesis was added, Captain in 20th Royal Fusiliers.

I carried this letter to Mildred, telling her frankly that, though she could see the others if she chose, this was the only one which I, personally, should be inclined to consider. I could see that the letter impressed her much as it had me. There was an expression of relief on her face, as she read through the few lines of firm handwriting.

"He is a gentleman, I am sure," was her only comment as she handed it back.

She seemed to leave all the arrangements so entirely to me, that I was a trifle embarrassed by the responsibility. The question was, how to bring about an acquaintance which would enable them both to decide whether or not they wished to carry out the plan, and at the same time cause as little talk as possible. Mildred was absolutely uninterested in this. To her, living as she was in a sort of white heat of martyr exaltation, there was no reason why the marriage should not take place at once. In the pure impersonality of her attitude, it made little difference who the man was, or what he was like. Seeing him, even, was a mere matter of formality. She agreed, however, to my plan, that since she and her family were going down into the country, the next week, it would be the best thing for Captain

Granger to stay at the little inn, about a quarter of a mile away. In that way we could easily see a great deal of him. I say *we*, for the whole family insisted upon my staying with them for the first few weeks, and I could not refuse, when I saw how Mildred looked to me to see her through.

I had meant to look up Captain Granger in the city, but I was suddenly called away on business, and returned just in time to help the family off and get them established in their very modest country place. The Captain was to follow when they had been settled for a day or two. I had had some correspondence with the lawyer to whom he referred us, and received an exact confirmation of the statements he had made about himself, with the added information that he was a man of irreproachable character and excellent family. Both were rather bare, cold facts, however, in view of the present situation.

On the day he had appointed to be at the inn, I set out to call on him. I was pretty nervous. It seemed to me now incredible that we had not been able to persuade Mildred out of this insane plan. I told myself irritably that we were a pack of helpless idiots to be so overruled by her obsession. I could not believe that I was actually going to see an unknown man on such an errand, and any prepossessions I had had in his favor were suddenly swept away in the thought that no reasonable being would ever have put himself in the position which he had accepted.

The servant who answered the bell led me into a long side porch, at the end of which I could see a

lounging chair, with a man's face showing against the cushions. The first glimpse of him brought me one relief. After some of the things I had seen in the hospitals, I had come dreading what I might find. In his face, at least, there was no touch of mutilation or disease. Though it was thin and white, so that his eyes looked startlingly dark, the profile was clear and strong and the head was finely shaped. A rug was thrown over the lower part of his body, and one sleeve was empty. I noticed though, in that first glance, that he did not wear a lounging-robe or any form of negligé, but was dressed with scrupulous care as any gentleman would be dressed for the business of the day.

As I approached, he held out his hand and smiled. At the transformation of the smile, I almost gasped. Seeing him, at first, lying back still and white in the depths of the chair, I had thought him a man up toward fifty. Now, as his dark eyes glowed and his face lighted up with a sort of shy brightness, I suddenly realized that he was young — not more than thirty, if he was that.

I sat down in the chair near him, and we began to talk a little awkwardly, — commonplaces first, about his journey down. He said he had a remarkably good servant, who managed those things comfortably — as comfortably as possible, he added. He spoke in a matter-of-fact tone of his injuries.

"They took off one leg at the knee. The other's stiff — no good. It's rather a bungle, isn't it? — to leave just this much of a man."

"Perhaps it's worse," I rejoined, "to be all here and not be able to do one's part."

"I think you've done your part," he answered quickly. "I know something about the relief work here at home. There's a lot more to it all than the killing."

He looked at me suddenly with keen, intelligent eyes.

"Mr. Farnum, I suppose you've been wondering, all along, how I happened to answer that advertisement."

I could not deny it; I had wondered more than ever, since I had seen him. He went on, slowly,— "It was an impulse,—an impulse of loneliness, I suppose. I haven't a near relative in the world. My sister died last winter, when I was at the front. Her husband was killed the day before her baby was born, and they couldn't keep it from her. She went out of her head, and died two days after—and the baby with her."

He stopped for a moment, his face working with emotion.

"It's hell," he burst out. "It's the only thing to do, of course, so long as we've got a country to fight for. But there's something all wrong when that *is* the only thing to do!"

Then he went on more calmly.

"I thought the woman who made that offer must have suffered. I thought she must be pretty fine and rare to make the offer. And I snatched at it,—as a drowning man might snatch at a hand stretched to him out of the night."

"She *is* — fine and rare," I said slowly. "She has the notion that, in doing this for some man, she will be serving, in spirit, the man whom she loved. I don't know — it seems less impossible since I have seen you."

"Thank you," he answered gravely. Then, after a moment's hesitation, he added, "You are a relative of hers?"

"Yes."

I was embarrassed, for a second, by his keen scrutiny. But then we began at once discussing practical details. His servant was to bring him up to the house, the next morning, and establish him on the porch. Then I would arrange to have him meet Mildred, alone, before the rest of the family saw him.

I told Mildred very little, that night, about our interview, for I wanted her first impressions to be wholly unprejudiced. I could feel that she was in a state of high nervous tension. In the morning it was very evident that she had slept little, and when the maid came to announce that Captain Granger was waiting on the porch, she trembled so that she could hardly walk through the drawing-room.

The Captain himself must have shared her embarrassment, but he managed to be matter-of-fact and cheerful. He and I kept up a resolute conversation until we had drawn her into it; then I left them alone for half an hour, and when I came back it was clear that his gentleness and courtesy had put her more at her ease.

It was interesting to watch the attitude of Mildred's mother and sister. If the Captain had presented himself in the way of ordinary acquaintance, there is no doubt they would have welcomed him with enthusiasm, for he had in his favor birth, breeding, a moderate fortune, and most unquestionable charm. But the unconventional circumstances made them receive him, at first, with a sort of startled distrust. As time went on, however, this wore off, and Captain Granger came to be as acknowledged a member of the family as I, myself. Charlotte one day voiced her sentiments to me in vigorous, though not very elegant phrasing, which was not really so unsympathetic as it sounded.

"If Mildred was determined to be a sentimental idiot, it's lucky she ran up against such a corker as the Captain."

As for me, Granger and I were becoming fast friends. When we were not both up at the house, I was likely to be down at the inn, smoking and chatting on the porch or in his rooms, which his man had made comfortable with some of the trappings from his chambers in town. We did not often mention Mildred, although now and then our talk glanced at her, when I got on to family matters. One day he asked me, abruptly, to tell him something about Roger. I did it with considerable enthusiasm, for Roger was always a favorite of mine. Forgetfully, I was running on, describing his active, buoyant figure, his dash as a rider and his skill in games, his cleanliness and love of fair play, when suddenly I saw Granger's face, and came to a full stop.

"Why couldn't it have been I, instead?" he cried out, almost angrily. "To go, whole and straight and clean, in the midst of the fight, instead of being carved up, piece by piece, and thrown aside! And there was so much — for him."

We were both silent for a time. Then he said slowly, "I wish I could have seen them together."

I happened to have in my pocket a kodak picture I had taken of Mildred and Roger, once, when they were rehearsing for a play. The costumes were of rather courtly style, and as they came in, someone called out, "You look like Romeo and Juliet." Laughing, Mildred stepped up on the stairs and leaned over the railing in characteristic Juliet pose. I made them hold the position until I had snapped the camera.

I held the picture out to Granger, and he studied it intently. It was much like Mildred, except that her face was sparkling with a girlish mischief he had never seen there. The elaborate dress, with its heavy train, only brought out the more the slim young grace of her figure. Roger, below, let the cloak fall back from his shoulders, sweeping his plumed hat low until it almost touched the floor. There was a mock flourish in his attitude, but even in the faulty little snapshot one could see that he was looking at her with his heart in his eyes.

Suddenly the Captain slammed the picture down on the table with the flat of his hand. "And they tell us there is a personal God," he said. "If there were, wouldn't his heart have broken, long ago?"

There was little talk about the war among us, in those days. It seemed to be a subject which we all, instinctively, shunned. But Mildred and Charlotte and their mother were knitting, as all women in England were knitting then, innumerable scarfs and mittens and caps for the soldiers or the Belgian refugees. Often, in the early fall nights, we had a fire for cheerfulness rather than for warmth, and while they knitted, Granger or I read aloud. One night, he picked up a volume of Rupert Brooke's poems, just out, which I had brought down the day before, and began reading.

"If I should die, think only this of me,
That there's some corner of a foreign field
That is forever England."

Half startled, I looked at Mildred. I had read the poem over that morning, thinking how strongly the spirit of it suggested Roger. She had dropped her knitting in her lap, and was leaning forward, looking at Granger with painful intensity. Her face was white and her eyes were wide and frightened. Suddenly she dropped her head, and began to cry, very softly. Granger must have noticed it, but he went on reading as if he had not. When he finished the poem, he turned to another, lighter one, and read a few lines, then made some ordinary remark to me. By that time, Mildred had got herself in hand. She went to the piano and began to play. The Captain watched her with an expression I had never seen on his face before, and suddenly I began to wonder. I had taken him at his own word, as proof against

emotion. He had told me of the girl he had cared for, a few years before, and how she had left him, although disillusioned, as he said "burnt out." He had dwelt so much on his feeling of being "down and out" of all the activities of the world, I wondered if, after all, this was going to mean to him something more than a means of making a helpless life more endurable.

One other thing I was beginning to wonder about, and that was, how long the present condition of things was going on. When I had insisted on a month, at least, of preliminary acquaintance, Mildred had seemed to wonder at its purpose. In her idealistic conception of the affair as an act of religious devotion, she saw no reason why they should know each other, at all. Now, however, the preliminary acquaintance had been running on for six or seven weeks, and she made no motion to bring it to a close. She treated the Captain as a trusted friend, but, so far as I knew, there had been no talk between them of anything else. I began to think I must make some suggestion myself, especially since this stay in the country, necessitating as it did frequent journeyings to London, was becoming a bit inconvenient.

I was out in the garden, one day, teasing Bruce, the collie. Bruce, as a pup, had been one of Roger's last gifts to Mildred, and when she hardly responded to the dog's caresses, as she came down the walk, I knew she had something on her mind.

"Alix," she said with a quiver in her voice, "I want to tell you something."

It was coming at last, I thought, and I braced myself a little. Much as I had come to care for Granger, it was something of a shock to face it.

Mildred went on, speaking hurriedly, picking tiny bits of bark off the tree as she spoke.

"Alix — I can't marry Captain Granger."

I was stunned by this sudden reversal of what I had nerved myself to expect.

"Mildred!" I cried, almost sharply. "What's the matter? Why not?"

Her only answer was to drop down on the garden seat and burst into a regular passion of tears. I sat down by her and tried to soothe her, but she had to cry it out, with gasping, panting sobs. When she had quieted a little, I said, very gently,

"Mildred, can't you tell me, dear, what it is — why you can't do what you had expected to?"

As there was no answer except her rather convulsive sobbing, I added, "We have all come to like the Captain so much, to admire him —"

She broke in then, facing me with wet eyes and heaving breast.

"Can't you see, Alix, that *that* is the reason?" Rather blankly I stared at her. She went on, her voice still quivering and tearful, though she was trying to steady herself now.

"I wanted to do it for Roger, — all for him. The man was to be just — something to represent him. And now — Oh, I don't care for him as I did for Roger. I don't want you to think I am like that. But I *could* come to feel that I wanted to do things

for him — that I was glad he was the one, instead of someone else. And that's all wrong — it's not what I had planned, at all."

"But Mildred," I said earnestly, "I don't see that that makes it wrong. It seems to me it makes it all the better for you both."

She shook her head.

"No," she said. "It's bad enough to know that I could have *any* feeling, even the least faintest shade of one, for *any* man, after — But, Alix, you'll tell him, won't you?"

I had to say that I would, of course; there was nothing else to do. But on my way to the inn I puzzled, hopelessly, over what I should say. All the instincts and traditions of manhood ordered me to keep Mildred's confidence to myself. It seemed impossible to do anything else. But on the other hand, could I go to the Captain, a man whom Fate had already hit hard enough, and, without vouchsafing any reason, give him another knockdown blow? Could I, above all, do it when I knew, far better than Mildred did, what her confession meant — that it carried in it possibilities of happiness for them both which her young idealism rejected? When I realized, too, what she herself might gain? For, well as I had loved Roger, his clean young strength and his firmness of courage, I knew that in the Captain she had found a bigger and a better man.

I was still uncertain when I found myself in Granger's room, and I blurted out my message, crudely enough, I felt with disgust.

He turned his face toward me, and it looked set and white.

"Farnum," he said, "will you tell me, have I done anything to offend Miss Curtis? Have I disappointed her?"

"No," I said, almost explosively.

"Can you tell me,—have you the right to tell me—Why?"

I hesitated. Then I threw over, recklessly, the restraint of etiquette. There was a higher honor, here, than the honor of silence.

"Granger," I said, "so far as I can make it out, it's Mildred's conscience that is in the way. She feels that marriage with you would not be the self-sacrifice she had planned to make it; that it might be possible, some day, for her to be happy with you."

His face lighted radiantly.

"God bless her!" he said under his breath. "I almost thought so, but I hardly dared hope it."

We were both silent for a minute. I was thinking with relief that my breach of confidence was justified by that one look on his face, and that it would be still further justified some time, by Mildred's own happiness. I was almost dazed when his next words showed how far his thoughts were from mine.

"Farnum," he said, "it's been awfully straight of you, all this. I sha'n't forget it. And—I hope we'll see each other—sometimes."

"But, man," I cried, struck by his voice even more than his words, "you're not going to give it up,—now? If you care, and you know she does, or can—"

"No," he said, "it isn't right, to her, and so she'll never do it. She's made that way. And I wouldn't make her, if I could. It was the fineness of her that made it possible for her to offer a supreme gift to an unfortunate. And it's that very fineness that makes her take it back when she sees it might possibly mean getting something for herself, at the cost of her ideal."

He drew himself up a little in his chair, and his eyes glowed up at me with sudden passion.

"She's done a far greater thing for me, Alix, than if she had married me. That would have been heaven, if you like — but it would have been charity. But this way — she's given me back my self-respect; she's made me feel I am still a man."

He held out his hand, and I gripped it, tightly.

"You're a man, all right, Granger," I said, choking a little. "You're a fool, too — I've got sense enough left to know that. But I almost wish I hadn't."

Then, with a final wring of his hand, I left him.

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The Midland

A MAGAZINE OF
THE MIDDLE WEST

JULY-AUGUST, 1919

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The Midland

A MAGAZINE OF THE MIDDLE WEST

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JULY—AUGUST 1919

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Two Poems

By FLORA SHUFELT RIVOLA

HEART-CRY

Heart, that is singing in rhythmic lays
With none to listen to you today,
(Well will they garland you with praise
When youth is spent and hair grows gray!)
Heart, I am glad you still can sing
A song to the lark, to the hills, to spring.

Soul, to your God, you two together
(God in the grass, in dawn, in dew),
Sharing the glow and the dun-gray weather,
What need of the praise of man have you?
Soul, what need of the praise of lips,
Since you with God touch finger-tips?

PROMISE

**This that is offered me, I take
In lieu of life—for living's sake!**

But why, if this be all, do I
Wonder and wait and ever sigh
For that which, evermore withdrawn,
Lures me forever on and on
Toward some goal which I only know
Exists because I need it so!
Some farther largess which must be
The fulness of Eternity—
The substance of the hoped-for thing
Fleeing before me swift of wing,
Evanescing, yet more real
Than mart or plow or loom or steel!

**This that is offered me, I take
In lieu of life—for living's sake!**

Ruth

By CHANDLER TRIMBLE

When War was dying on Death's crucial height—
Those days!—and pale Disease with vapoury,
damp,
Chill fingers crept abroad each misty night
To seize his toll of lads from our grim camp,—

She volunteered to aid beside their beds;
Despite contagion's chance, do what she could,

By tender cheer and soothing fevered heads,
In woman's service for her country's good.

And there she breathed the panting, poisoned breath,
Night-long in her clean-sheeted, tossing wards,
Of him she drove from many a pillow,—Death
Invisibly crept in past wearied guards.

They said that he would claim her ere the dawn.
Death's sign she wore, as tho he would her wed
Who had no other lover, and her drawn
White look was resignation to his bed.

Remained of brave young life a few brief hours!
And Love and I (who were so fortunate)
Sent her a gift of glowing petaled flowers,
Hoping their gentle light would not be late.

Hoping, tho strangers, still we might convey
Thru them some grateful meed to her dimmed
heart
Would win it back with beauty to the day
Where roses bloom and birds at sunrise start.

With them we sent some brief well-wishing card—
“*For your unselfish service,*” so it read,
“*To this our Country.*”—Praise is always hard:
Too often given only to the dead.

They say she clasped the fresh leaves to her breast;
Oft kissed them, while bright tears her eyes let
flow;
And when day bloomed, with life and breathing rest,
Once whispered—“*No one ever loved me so.*”

Two Poems

By NELSON ANTRIM CRAWFORD

IN THE KEY OF BLUE

A FIELD OF FLAX

I have a field of blue-blooming flax.
The fiber is tense and tough.
From it may God make blue garments
For the white joy of Him,
For the grave glory of Him.

Like that blue there is no other—
Sturdy, caressing, unbearably perfect,
Not hiding,
Nor revealing,
Merely being.
It is not one blue,
But three:
One quite somber,
One quite glad,
One quite full of wistfulness.
Yet they agree in one.

You, beloved,
You are a field of blue-blooming flax.
The fiber is tense and tough.
From it may God make blue garments
For the white joy of Him,
For the grave glory of Him.

A VOICE

It is too dark to see
The hard, white, poplar-bordered road
Or the soft warm lake beyond one poplar row.
But your voice comes from the dark, and I see
A dull-blue woven thing,
Full of the smell of blue roses
Blown across a misty salt sea.

HANDS

Molder of Visions,
I will take your two hands,
Browned, strong, tender, creative,
One of them wearing a blue and silver ring.
And I will make them into music—
Music of blue-and-silver nights
And stark red days on brown sands
And lilac-lighted sunsets,
And the hands of God the Artist,
Browned, strong, tender, creative,
One of them wearing a blue-and-silver ring—
Holding,
Shaping,
Molding intricately
Tough, pliant clay.

TREES**THE CATALPA**

Pink-sprinkled summer twilight
And soft brown velvet tones
Of a violin.

THE APPLE TREE

Dance, *ma petite cherie*,
Isn't it spring?
And spring doesn't last always,
Ma petite cherie.

PINES

The slow measure of the chanted war song
The storm cloud, dull throbbing black against the
sky
The lover constant though unloved.

POPLARS

Statuesque cold-eyed women
In smooth, caress-inviting green silk
En promenade.

THE OAK

Yes, William Morris,
Here is your heart
In a tree,
Where you would have it.
Yes, it still lives:
Every oak is a memory of you.

WILLOWS

Coquettes tinkle ukeleles
Fatuously,
Droopily,
The exertion tires them—poor dears!

THE JINKGO

Heavy Chinese sirup,
Lucent, cloying,
Drunk on a tiny blue table
To the tiny, lotus-scented tinkle
Of a temple bell.

THE BLUE SPRUCE

Faultlessly carven jade
Is no more faultless than you are,
Little tree.
But I love you,
Little tree,
In spite of your faultlessness.

A Day

By FLORENCE KIPER FRANK

She was awakened with a start by the sharp voice of her mother in the early dawn. "Get up! hurry! right away! they've sent for us!"

"O, mother!" she gasped. "He's worse!"

The streets looked large and bare in the early light. The girl wondered curiously, as the big horse jogged on, what the people in the quiet houses were doing. She felt that she would like to tell her mother that she did not suffer, but somehow she was unable to speak. She sat stiff and erect—and cold, very cold. Was it really she that was concerned in this thing about to happen? Her heart and her brain were as stone.

She jumped from the carriage and helped her mother dismount the low step. She rang the bell at the door and awaited the door's opening without a tremor—that door before which for many days she had paused breathless, fearful of the words that might greet her. But now she was strong and cold—very cold.

Within she saw the faces on which agony lay bare. With a curious intensity she saw them. "I am seeing the quick of anguish," she said to herself, and marveled at the literary sound of the words. Stolidly she heard that he had been unconscious since midnight. "He is dying!" she told herself, "He is dying!" and tried to drive in the words, but they had no meaning for her.

In the front room his mother crouched moaning, and the girl brought a cup of coffee and forced it by spoonful between her unwilling lips. "You must drink," she soothed, "for strength, you know, for strength!" She was proud of her effectiveness, as she watched the brown, hot liquid slowly disappear. His mother put her arms about the girl's neck, and sobbed against her shoulder. "It's hard dear, for you too!" The girl knew that she ought to be touched to tenderness, but her heart was vacant. Why should anyone be sorry for her? She felt nothing, nothing, nothing. She would never feel again.

She passed into the room where he lay in the white bed. His eyes were half shut, horrible. Two nurses sat at the bedside, quiet and watchful, one at either hand. His breath tore his body. The girl stared and stared again, and with a dull persistence tried to beat it into her brain that he was dying. But that man on the bed—it was not he. No, his eyes had glowed and laughed and his cheeks had reddened with joy when he saw her. This man on the bed was a yellow body, a stranger.

He would die without speaking again, they had told her. But that was impossible; he had never been cruel to her; he would not be cruel now; he would give her some word—one word by which to live. She must have a message to light the inexplicable life ahead.

The faces that knew he was dying maddened her. She seized her coat and stumbled angrily into the air.

Outside, the sky was brilliant and cloudless. The

July sun shone as it had shone on other days. She remembered vaguely that in books people thought about this: that the sun was shining as it had shone on other days. Her numb feet took her on and on. A few unreal persons passed her and gave her unreal glances. At the edge of the lake she paused, and stood still, gazing out upon the swelling waters. This silence was freer, calmer, than the awful stillness of the house. "He is dying!" she said to the waters. "He is dying!" And then, "I want to die, too. I want to go with him." But she knew that she could not, and in some far-away dull manner she pitied herself—she who must live with the will to die. The slow tears came to her eyes.

She returned to the house and opened the door, and they told her that since she had gone, it had happened. Her mother held her arms about the girl, crying and comforting. She did not cry, nor return her mother's embraces. She knew that It had happened. She slipped from her mother's arms and stood alone, in the middle of the room, quite still, and said softly to herself, again and again, "He is dead!" She had known that it would come, but—not like this. This was—different! He was—nowhere, nowhere! Yet how could that be—that he was nowhere? Again and again she repeated his name softly, insistently, and said "Gone!", and she had the sense that she was a naked soul whirling about in the glare of God.

His mother came rushing in and caught the girl to her with wild sobs, crying that he had loved the girl, that he had loved her too, that he had loved them both. His mother's anguish tore down

through the numbness of the girl, and her own anguish cried out with cries as terrible. She was amazed when the others sought to quiet them. They two alone were sane in a universe where all should be shrieking.

Bye and bye she was calmer, and she felt a wish to see him. Her mother went with her, but they did not speak to each other. Hand in hand they stood silent and gazed at him where he lay. He was beautiful in her eyes beyond what she had known of beauty. But he was not hers. A distance lay between them as of centuries. She had no impulse to touch him with her hands, to hang upon him with passionate kisses, as she had thought she would do when this should come. She was awed and breathless with the remoteness of death, with the dignity of its silence.

They took her home erect and tearless. She determined, with clenched hands, to remain erect and tearless through all that was to follow. "That was brave!" more than once he had commented quietly, on some trivial evidence of hard-won self-control. If he were anywhere now, if he were near enough to know, she would win his approval again, she would be his voice and his representative, she whom he had loved—whom he had loved more than all the others, she told herself fiercely. She would be his bride, the bride of his soul, the august, austere bride of his fearless spirit. She needed no help nor prop. His strength had passed into her.

And then at the door of her room, shrouded in the late twilight, came back upon her, as with the rush of a wave engulfing her, tumultuously, vividly, insist-

ently, all the dear human sweetness of him, his gentleness, his weaknesses, his beautiful voice. She was shaken and broken by a thousand memories. Her knees gave way under her, and they laid her on the couch.

“Mother! mother!” she sobbed to the soft face pressed against her own. “O, mother!”

Two Poems

By SAMUEL ROTH

MOURNING

In all the world, and all the world,
Nothing has so strange a cry
As an Italian Funeral March
Or a Jewish Lullaby.

And O the healing consolation
Melodies like these could give,
Only that the dead are buried,
Only that the living live.

SUNDOWN

'From Riverfront to Riverside,
Through alley, street and avenue,
A bugle trills, a bugle trills,
 Faint as failing day,
And out of every window glass
Flares a light of red and blue,
And over every ship that drops
 Silent down the bay.

The bugle calls, the bugle calls,
Unto the humble and the great,
Its voice is clear as any bell
 In a steeple tower,
And they who move the vendor's cart
And they who move the hands of Fate
Stir tremulously like the leaves
 Of a wind blown flower.

From Riverfront to Riverside
Like a royal messenger
Through alley, street and avenue
 Evening speeds the word:
It matters not, it matters not,
Eagle brood or sparrow, for
God is nodding on his Throne
 Tired as any bird.

The Mixing

By DON HARRISON

Tom Mitchel sat in the door of a box-car, listening to the merry click of the wheels and feeling against his face the rush of wind. Over the grain fields a breeze spread, like the flow of a silver tide on hard sands. To sweep along, not too fast, and swing his legs above the world was a fine thing. He shut his eyes to give himself completely to the rush of wind on his face. When he opened them, stubble, on which squatted hay stacks, had replaced the fields. About one stack fussed jerking figures. This seemed a sordid business, to strip beauty from the breast of the earth. Profoundly he was satisfied in being free from it—up, somehow, with the blue of the skies and the gold of the sun. He took off his hat and followed the prairie that rolled into the violet haze of the unknown. Against the deepening purple a leaden bank of clouds was growing. Attracted as if by a magnet to the gray foundation, white puffs scudded faster and faster to pile up in a churning mass of gold-streaked silver. Through the edges of the silver and gold pile, seeped the pink of filtered sunlight; and behind it hung the deep blue curtain of the sky. In that blue, Tom felt a promise of the life to which he was going—the life of the South Seas, where beauty mixed with work; where green depths of waters swam down for a thousand fathoms; where white beaches gleamed like dead

men's bones in the steady beat of the sun. He sighed with the almost suffocating joy of it. If his father in the first place had only let him be free a while instead of sending him to law school—

"Ridin' on yer face, bo?"

Tom's eyes opened; from dream to reality he turned his head and grinned at the brakeman. "Sure, it's good, isn't it?"

He missed the rocks of the road-bed, and rolled and rolled over and over in the sand of an empty creek ten feet below. He was surprised; but before the car had slipped out of sight, he managed to stand up and wiggle his fingers at the brakeman in the door.

"The darn fool would've gotten his two bits if he'd only given me a chance," he laughed. He stopped sharp, as if someone had clapped a hand over his mouth. "Why, the idiot might've killed me just for a dirty two-bits!"

Under his brown skin a muscle tautened, pulling his mouth into startling grimness. Then he smiled again at the utter ridiculousness of arguing to himself, out loud, in the burning sand of a dried-up creek, over the actions of a brakeman who, as far as he was concerned, no longer existed. But there he was, God alone knew how many miles from a town. And swinging on to such moving realities as trains is never so simple as falling off. He spread his coat over the burning surface of a boulder, then sat down to think. They were making hay. He wrinkled his face in disgust. But the

money would be earned in a few days. Then the nearest town, another freight west—

“Hey, wait a minute! Hey you!” he shouted in sudden decision, and scrambled up the bank to the road.

A yellow-wheeled buckboard stopped, and let its enveloping dust drift slowly ahead. Tom walked up and laid his hand confidently on the arm of the seat, but dropped it and moved back a pace when he saw the man sitting there. He never would have hailed him but for that cloud of dust. No, if he had seen that figure, squashed in the corner of the seat like a gunny sack loosely packed with straw, he never would have shouted. And if he had seen the eyes and face,—eyes which flared suddenly, then filmed into the oily glow of detached contempt; eyes pushed deep into a face from which the flesh seemed to have dried, leaving flabby folds of skin burned red over the sharp angles of a skull, much too small— He had nothing to say. He waited, listening to a grotesquely weak whistle issuing from between thin lips folded into a million little wrinkles, each one the tiny root of a sneer. The whistle ceased, and a hand swollen enormously with the cramped strength of labor reached for the arm of the seat nearest Tom, and pulled forward the pudgy body,—as an accordion is pulled out. Tom stepped back another pace.

“Wal!”

Tom brushed his hand across his eyes; the tang of perspiration made them smart. He wanted to forget why he had stopped the buckboard.

“Pretty warm.”

It seemed ridiculous, inadequate, but it was all he could say: after the rushing breeze of the train, the utter calm of the immense heat seemed to surround him with a vacuum of absolute silence.

The lips of the man in the buggy folded themselves slowly, a wrinkle at a time; a monstrously twisted "Nearer My God to Thee," like a challenging smack in the mouth, whipped Tom into resolution.

"Know anyone around here who needs a hand?" he asked.

The man's body collapsed abruptly, the huge hand rose to stretch the sagging folds of his neck. His eyes appraised slowly every inch of Tom's body, feeling through his khaki shirt for the strength of his muscles, and in his eyes battled admiration for the brawn which they found and contempt for the youth which they saw. Finally he spoke, very slowly as if sorry to spend his words.

"Wal, I kin use ye. Two fifty, grub and bunk. Hayin' 'll last two weeks yet. House about two mile down the road."

Tom started for the buckboard.

"Ye'll hev to walk, stranger. It's too hot to load up on the horse today."

The lines slapped, the dust rose about the buckboard again, and from its midst Tom heard a "Rock of Ages" that seemed to tighten the skin on his back.

"Phew!" Tom's half whistle, half sigh expressed relief and uncomfortable fear. The man in that yellow-wheeled buggy affected him as childhood presentiments of coming fever used to,—with an

impotent, waiting dread of something evil about to settle down on him, an unseen, heavy vapor, a vapor full of endless solitudes and alive with writhing horrors.

At the horizon the pile of clouds had built itself into a leaden roof, cut low down by a slit running half around the edge of the world through which glowed the molten red of liquid gold. Then, chunk by chunk, the leaden roof melted and dropped into the ruddy glow, and a star, foolishly early, fought for a moment against the last thin blue of day and went out in the pink shadow of the huge fire.

Tom felt relieved as he watched. After all, he need not stay long. And a whistle! It was almost ludicrous that he should let a grotesque whistle push into his life. At home and in college, he had prided himself upon his detachment, his ability to mix with all sorts of men, to take an artistic interest in the many details of life without fusing himself in it. But he had a vague uncertainty of his detachment now, as he set off down the road, gazing into the dancing puffs of dust he kicked before him.

He walked the open road perhaps two miles, then a wagon track cut through a hayfield and under a grove of trees to end at the white iron gate of a barnyard. The yard was surrounded on three sides by red frame buildings, almost black in the dusk. He held open the gate while a hay-rack rattled in and on toward the shadow of the buildings. Through the screen door of a squat house, almost all roof, sifted an uncertain yellow glow. He went to it, and sat on the edge of its shallow porch.

Behind him, the fringe of newspaper on the screen-door rustled almost silently.

"Wal, ye're here."

Tom jerked about so that he faced the door. The voice seemed to have curved through a maze of tortuous passages before it crept into audibility.

"What's yer name?"

Tom had forgotten his name for a moment. "Tom," he stammered, "Tom Mitchel."

"Tain't hard t' remember. Some folks do show sense, sometimes." Tom felt the whole world included in the sneer. "Mine's Amos Thompson. Supper'll be ready when them fellers git through." He pointed toward the trough, where a gas engine coughed spasmodically and half a dozen men stood in line, each holding a team of horses.

After the screen-door rustled shut, Tom waited. It seemed to him that Amos Thompson had not finished. Then, inside the house, a thin whistle groped for the steadiness of a tune; and finding it, pushed a dried "Holy City" through the meshes of the screen, whose wires seemed to shred it into discord, to separate it into quarreling vibrations. He stood up; he had been waiting for that whistle: he had felt that Amos was incomplete without it.

"Say, ain't that enough to drive you dippy?" Some one was speaking to him, holding his drawling boyish voice so low that it was a note in the quiet of the dusk. He must have stepped upon the porch very softly; dimly Tom could see him leaning against the side of the house, next to the door.

"You mean the whistle?" Through the dark he

looked to see whether the face was what the voice promised,—a voice that mixed with Amos Thompson's whistle as the swish of the free winds in the arms of the windmill mixed with the rusty clank of the pump below.

"Yep, that's sure what I mean."

The face was like the voice; a face too white to be there in the sombre dusk, against the black wall of a house squatting in the openness of the prairie. He felt the boy should be somewhere else—in the blue haze of mountains, south.

"You all goin' to work heah?"

"Got to—for a while."

"I reckon you all'll git used to it. He drives we uns with it. Never says nothin'; just kinda makes you cuss God Almighty for bein' the reason for hymns an' too many hours in the day. You sure did pick a musical place to work, stranger!"

The men from the barns had been scraping heavy feet over the porch and sousing their heads in buckets of water which they carried from the pump. Tom felt the sordidness of them as they one by one crunched toward the door, long arms swinging free from slouching shoulders, heads sagging on deep chests, legs bound in their movements by overstrong muscles,—huge black bulks against the shadow of settling night.

"Come on, stranger, if you all want your share of the bacon."

Tom and the boy passed through the screen-door, and slid into a vacant space on one of the benches along both sides of the table. The air was blue with

bacon smoke; and as Tom leaned his hands on the table in sitting down, they slipped on the shiny oil-cloth. The men did not look up; strangers had a habit of coming out of the blush of the morning and sinking back into the gray of night; and they, too, were wanderers. Besides, they were eating, furtively sucking up the meat swimming in fat, and stealing each mouthful from under the grudging glances of Amos, who sat at the head of the table, his mouth puckered as he whistled silently to himself. Tom could not eat. Over the dull red sheen of the oilcloth he watched a hulk of a man snatch a slab of bread from the stack. With it he mopped the congealed grease and potato crumbs into a pile which he shoveled into his mouth, his head so lowered above his knife that his black hair flapped over his eyes. White bread crumbs dropped into the mat of hair on his chest.

"You all goin' to carry some grub back to the bunkhouse, Pete?"

Pete grinned, and brushed away the crumbs.

Tom had forgotten the boy. He looked at him. Yes, he had been right about the blue mountains: two eyes as deep and soft and smiling as the blue of a Kentucky evening danced back his look.

"You all ain't got much of an appetite, pardner."

And the cheeks were as if a spirit had been tanned,—the whiteness of those who dream touched by the sun of those who sweat. And the hair curled. But the chin fought back at life.

Tom mumbled and ate his potatoes.

"My name's the Kid. What's your'n?"

Tom's answer lost itself as he looked across to a door through which waivered a baby's screaming wail. A woman emerged from the smoke about the stove. She stopped for a moment to brush her hair from her eyes, her big hand showing red against the deadness of her face, the pallor of which the fierce heat of the fire could not burn to life; then she went into the outer room. She too, slouched as the men did, with her heels on the floor, rocking her twisted body grotesquely as if her legs were shackled. In a minute she came back, carrying a baby on her hip; then she and the baby were enveloped by the blue smoke.

With grunts of satisfaction, the men pushed the benches from the table, and filed out and across the yard to the bunkhouse. Tom stayed behind, watching Amos's wife. With the baby still on her hip, she had begun to clear away the heavy dishes. She dropped plates and cups with a clatter into a large dishpan. Amos whistled dryly.

"Say Moll," he rasped, "ye want ter break them dishes!"

His wife did not look up, but the clatter died to a furtive grating as she slid the dishes into the pan. She started for the stove, the dishpan on one hip, the baby on the other. Tom jumped up, took the load and carried it for her. Amos stopped his tune.

"Mitchel," he half whistled his words, "the women folks kin take keer of their own work. Mebbe ye could find somethin' to do in the bunkhouse."

Blinking his eyes at Tom, he started to whistle again. Tom's lips drew back a trifle from his teeth,

but he did not speak: he punched his knuckles against the screen-door in slamming it behind him.

"I thought you all were agoin' to push his face in, Mitchel."

The Kid was standing in the moonlight, his hand extended for Tom's. Something in the clasp cooled Tom's head and made the silver loneliness of the night less vast.

"I would've done it myself, but— Well, I've just got to keep my job. . . . You all'll have to bunk with me, I reckon," he added. "That's the bunkhouse with the light in it."

Suddenly from the shadow of the bunkhouse welled the sob of a violin,—a sob so poignant in its loneliness, so mad with the helpless savagery of life, that it seemed to gather in itself the undertone of the night—the weary iterance of the locusts' clicking drone, the black mystery of shadows in the moonlight, the intense brooding of the prairie,—to gather it up in the wierd rising and falling of its melody, then echo it in sighs through the spectral heaps of the barns.

"For the love of Pete!" gasped Tom, stopping.

"Reckon he's drunk," whispered the Kid. "That's when he plays."

The echoes wavered until, a mere breath, they slid into the sigh of the night wind through the tall grass outside the hayfield gate. Tom felt almost afraid to speak, as if a word might arouse a soul to wander hopeless through the night.

"Who is it?" he finally asked.

"I reckon nobody knows. Plumb nutty when he's

drunk; never says nothin' when he ain't. He's from Denmark."

A fear crept over Tom, a fear that he might be pulled into a life that he did not want to live: be pulled in by the soft touch of a southerner's drawl, by the horror of a farmer's whistle, by the mad loneliness of a drunken Dane's fiddlings. He had left Iowa, quarreled with his father, because he had hated the law school. It had seemed an imbecile rushing about, without clear sense of its end, in search of things that did not matter. And here he was, slipping into a more violent turmoil, into a life more brutal, more obscure. It was absurd; and yet, he felt as if the open night would be too big a solitude except for the Kid at his side.

"Low as how you un' me, we uns better fix up our bunk."

We uns! Our bunk! There was a profound and satisfied submission in Tom's heart as he and the Kid entered the bunkhouse.

It was hot in the bunkhouse, and the interior reminded Tom of a large packing box, with its resinous smell and unfinished boards. Through the thin partition that cut it in two came a roaring jargon of guttural Swedish, and a monotonous stamping of boots to the wheezy wail of a mouth-organ. The air was heavy with sweat and a mixture of tobacco odors: the pungent bite of Virginia flake, the weight of Burley, the smooth drowsiness of Turkish. About a yellow lamp which spluttered jerkily through the haze, four of the men were playing poker, thumping the cards down with rough knuck-

les, swearing and laughing with each change of luck. The fiddler, his red skin shining through a tangle of yellow hair and whiskers, lay sprawled in a knot of dirty blankets on an iron bed. With each rise and fall of his chest, his violin, which he held tight in his arms, touched his cheek; and it seemed to Tom as he watched that there was almost a mutual caress in the contact. A million insects whirred through the window, bumping, knocking, buzzing. Tom brushed them away angrily.

The Kid smiled. "You all can't keep 'em off. Let's go out. I've got a fine place on the pigpen to watch the moon an' listen to things."

So they walked to the pigpen in a silver lake of moonlight — a spectral lake over the prairie that seemed to rebuke with its aloofness the erratic blinking of the stars—and climbed on the sloping roof to lie on their backs and dream in the infinite blue of the sky. For a long time neither of them spoke. The very beauty of the depth of sky held for Tom a touch of hopelessness—hopelessness of the life into which he felt himself slipping. In the multitude of stars, in the purity of the night, in the melting cry of a meadow lark, he felt a life that should be, but a life that was far away. Out of somewhere a breeze travelled, and in its coming picked up tiny drops of moisture from the white breast of the prairie, drops that smelled almost of the freshness of the sea. Below, the pigs grunted lazily, then squealed in rage as they fought for the soft spots in the dust.

Tom rolled over on his side and looked at the Kid.

"Funny how a hog manages to get his grunt into everything," he said.

"Um," mumbled the Kid, "but I 'low a grunt is better'n a whistle."

"You mean Thompson's?"

"I sure do."

Tom propped his head on his hand. "He must have a big farm."

"Reckon he works about two thousand acre. Gits all he can out of this country that looks like gold un' ain't, with that whistle of his. An' it makes we uns work some, too." A heavy weariness dragged in his words as he went on. "He durn nigh killed me about a month ago. I got a touch of the sun that kinda laid me out. He shoved me under a rack. When I come to, he just naturally whistled me back to work. I was out of my head for all of that night, an' reckoned I'd lay off the next day. But he 'lowed as how, seein' my wages was plumb drawn up, I'd have to work or git. It was hell for a couple of days, but I stuck to it. I've got to."

"Why have you got to? I'm going to move on in a couple of days to a real country. Better come along."

"I sure would like to, pardner; but I can't. I've got a kid sister back in Pittsburg."

"You don't come from Pennsylvania?"

"No suh, I don't. I come from Kaintucky. But my kid sister's in Pittsburg. You all see that's why I can't quit. She works in a store, an' me an' her, we uns make enough for her to live on. I was

there too, only a doc reckoned I had a cough what'd get along better out west. An' how do you happen out this way?"

"Me? Oh, I'm just knocking around." Tom thought for a moment, then explained. "Dad kicked me out because I quit law school."

The Kid sat up. His drawl was very soft. "You don't say. . . . But your ma shure could've fixed it up with your pap?"

"She died a long time ago. I just remember her telling me fairy stories. And dad makes more wagon wheels back in Davenport than anybody else in the world. He wanted to get me ready for his business. I couldn't stand the grind."

"I reckon I know. Mine, she's dead too."

The breeze had ceased; it was a memory in the silence. They climbed from the pigpen, and walked back over the silver lake to the bunkhouse.

So Tom and the Kid bunked together in an iron bed, and worked together, and in the detachment of the night's beauty forgot together the horror of Amos' whistle—until Amos and his whistle went away. He had opened a letter, blinked twice like a rat in a sudden light, and then started for Indiana without stopping to change his clothes. His brother had died, leaving his farm to Amos; and Amos distrusted lawyers more than he did the rest of the world. He gave Pete charge of the hayfields.

Pete always swore at the Kid, by way of expressing a rough affection,—an affection really so gentle that he felt it a weakness which he must cover. And such an evident covering ridiculously emphasized

what lay underneath. So the day after Amos left, when Pete suddenly decided that he needed a wagon load of rock to repair a barn foundation, he sent the Kid to the quarry, ten miles away, with profane orders to boss the job and make the "big stiff," meaning Tom, do the heavy work. As soon as Pete's hay-rack had rattled out of the yard, Tom usurped the boss's job by sending the Kid to Mrs. Thompson for their lunch, while he hitched up the team.

During the ten-mile drive, the Kid, his hat on his knees, the breeze tangling his curly hair, drawled and laughed and clucked as he slapped the lines on the horses' broad backs. And when, in passing through an unfenced cornfield, one of the horses snatched at a green corn leaf, the Kid stopped so that it might finish; and to "sorter even things up" climbed from the wagon, pulled a handful of leaves, and carried them to the other horse, patting its head as it munched. Tom noticed the snap of the Kid's blue eyes and the faint color of his pale, tanned face when he climbed back on the wagon.

"Gosh, Tom, feel most happy enough to fly to-day."

Tom felt happy too. But he wondered, looking beyond the cornfield to where the prairie made a line with the sky. He was happy because the Kid was happy. And yet there was uneasiness in it. He was troubled a little because he had lost his fine aloofness in the glow of his first unselfish friendship. It meant that he was growing to be a part of the life in which the Kid lived,—a life made up of raw

strength in a land of beauty. And he was troubled more because from his place as part of it he could not combine its elements of work and beauty so that they mixed as they should. He felt that as a tolerant spectator he could have seen what it all meant, could even have smiled at it; but there was disquietude in the fear that he might now never detach himself,—might never again get away to the disinterested level of a spectator.

At the quarry the Kid unhitched the horses, took off their harness, and haltered them in the shade of the cliff, above a heap of hay which Tom pulled from the wagon. Pete had blasted a pile of rock slabs the week before; it lay just below the cliff, near one end.

"Say, Kid, you climb up and roll down those chunks on the top. I'll load them into the wagon."

The Kid clambered up, and he sang and whistled as he swung his pick, sending the slabs crashing to the bottom of the pile. Then he stopped, his whistle dying and rising to an exclamation of astonishment when he saw Tom, the muscles rolling under the tightening back of his blue shirt, slowly heave a huge slab into the wagon.

Tom looked up. "What's the matter? Hurt yourself?"

"I knowed you all was strong, but—Gosh, I just reckon you could break a guy's neck if you all wanted to."

"Reckon I all could, but reckon I all am not going to. You get busy and roll down those rocks. I'm getting hungry."

The lunch must have expressed Mrs. Thompson's liberation: a thick coating of yellow butter between big slices of bread, a roasted chicken, a pot of jam, lettuce, radishes, and onions from her garden.

The Kid hugged himself, dancing around on one foot. "If he knew it—oh, gee! I'll eat every crumb if I bust. Reckon we uns got by him this time."

After dinner they lay in the shade of the wagon for an hour, then finished loading, and going back to the farm took turns walking beside the team. When they pulled into the barnyard, Pete met them with a volley of profanity for being so long. But under each oath echoed a rough good nature, and he grinned as the Kid looked at Tom and laughed.

The Kid's high spirits lasted; and in the sun, next day, his pitchfork flashed like swordplay over the top of the haystack.

"Go easy, Kid," warned Tom toward the middle of the afternoon, as he stuck his fork and yelled down for the water-jug.

"Oh, I'm all right," answered the Kid. "Reckon I'll take a swig at that jug, though."

Tom tossed the jug across the narrow top of the stack, and stooped to pick up his fork. As he straightened, he saw the Kid's fingers one by one slip their hold on the jug, and his hand fumble to his head. Then, before Tom could reach him, the red passed in a slow wave from his face, leaving it grey, his knees doubled, and he slid head first from the stack.

Pete picked him up and carried him, held tight to

his hairy chest, the mile to the bunkhouse. Tom followed, the Kid's hat in his hand.

"Pete, he isn't dead?"

Pete laid the Kid on his bunk.

"Hell no!" he growled. "But it'll git 'im yet. What does a guy like him got to hev a sister for? He don't belong out here, nohow." Pete slipped a pillow under the Kid's head. "An' he's a durn good kid."

Tom was taking off the Kid's shoes. "What do you know about his sister?"

"Hearn him tellin' you 'bout her t'other day."

Pete kicked the screen-door open. "You stick with 'im. I'll handle yer fork."

All through the afternoon Tom bathed the Kid's head. And the realization came to him, profound and solemn, that he and the Kid were going to keep right on bunking together for a long, long time.

Sunday morning Pete forgot to order the men to clean out the barns, Amos' way of making them earn their Sabbath "grub". The Kid, still a little weak, lay dozing. On a box, propped in the corner, the Danish fiddler, his head tipped back, played very slowly and in a low key some old Lutheran hymns. Tom tilted his chair against the iron foot of the Kid's bed, and gazed sleepily through the open door. In the barn, he could see the horses swishing their tails, and could hear the easy munch of their teeth in the oats. A maple tree broke the sunlight into splotches on the red farmhouse wall, and when a breeze murmured through its leaves, it twinkled their surfaces into gleaming reflectors or deep green

shadows. The pigs buried themselves deeper in the dust, and grunted contentedly and lazily.

Tom stood up and stretched himself. The Kid muttered, angrily swept away the flies, then sat up and yawned.

"Say, Kid, do you feel like walking over to the river to-night?"

The dinner bell clanged its heavy strokes through the rustling silence of the barnyard.

"I sure do. Let's wash. I'm goin' to eat a regular meal this noon."

In the afternoon all the men started for the drug store at Moordon, ten miles away. The Kid dropped to sleep, and Tom sat beside him brushing the flies from his face. About six o'clock the Kid awoke suddenly.

"You durned ole fool, you all been keepin' them flies off'n me all evenin'?"

Tom covered a vague feeling of guilt with a grin.

"Only a little while, Kid. Say, come on if we are going to the river. Mrs. Thompson will give us something to eat when we get back."

The cool wind, softened by the coming of sunset, played over the hayfields as Tom and the Kid started down the road that gleamed in the level shafts of light. They were quiet until finally the Kid looked at Tom, his eyes serious.

"Say, Tom, why don't you all make up with your pap?"

Tom watched the brightened dust cloud scuffed up at his feet.

"Nothing doing, Kid. I'm getting to like it pretty well out here."

The dry grass of a mown field crackled under their feet, then they clambered up a sharp incline of rock slabs to a ledge, far above the river.

"Reckon you an' me, we was made for pals, Tom."

"Reckon so, Kid."

They sat with their legs hanging over the ledge of rock, and looked at the river, steep down a hundred feet. It was the half way time between twilight and dusk—the time of rest and fading light and coolness, when the heat is already cut by the shiver of the night breeze. High up in the west cloud-masses flushed in a pale afterglow. Upon the earth the shadows were heavy; but the wide river clung to the light with the tenacity of quicksilver. Something in the spirit of the river kept Tom and the Kid very quiet: the bigness, the power of it, the utterly futile combat its waters fought to retain the brightness of day. So they watched while the shadows changed from grey to black, and the moon came to shower down a flaky path of silver and to touch the heavy waters into a fairy dance, enticing a million star reflections into a winking madness of motion. Below the dance of silver light, deep down in the waters, rushed the strength of the river that swept between the bluffs.

Tom stirred, a rock clattered, then silence and a hollow plunk.

"Kid, why can't some of this get into the work.

we do? God Almighty must have meant work to be good and happy."

The Kid, his chin propped in his hand, was looking out over the prairie where, beyond the river, it stretched away.

"You know what I mean, Kid. If things were mixed right—mixed like the moonlight and the power in the water down there. It's never done it for me. That's why I couldn't stay in law school. And the men in the factory didn't have it."

"I kind of get what you all mean, Tom. I reckon God Almighty did mean it to mix right, only somethin' always kind of stirs it wrong like. But it'll mix that way sometime."

A screech owl shrilled his weary, quavering cry, and a coyote yammered at the whiteness of the moon.

"We better be moving, Kid. We've got that barn to clean out in the morning."

"Reckon the flies'll get us out on time," answered the Kid, as he stood up.

The road home was a silver river, and their feet padded softly in the dew-laid dust.

Monday, they started to fill the haybarns, and Tuesday afternoon they were working up next to the rafters. It was a hell filled with dust. Tom started to count the huge loads of the hay-fork clanking back and forth, to see if he could forget time in the counting; but he turned sharply when the Kid coughed behind him,—a cough dull and wheezy. The Kid's head was sagging a little, his cheeks were scarlet.

"Kid, you get! It'll be all right with Pete."
"I reckon I can stand it if you all can."
"I reckon you all can't," mocked Tom. "Now, get!"

Tom pushed him to the ladder.

"Hey, you Kid! Better come down before you git too hot," yelled Pete from the rack outside.

"Guess mebbe I'd better. My head does feel kind of woozy like." The Kid's feet groped uncertainly on the rungs as he climbed down.

Tom dug his pitchfork savagely into the hay. He forgot to count the loads of the hayfork. Why did the Kid have to kill himself? Weren't there men enough like Pete to make hay? And he wouldn't ever let anybody give him anything; Tom knew he did not dare even suggest it. He jabbed his pitchfork more savagely, and left it sticking in the hay while he reached for his handkerchief to mop the sweat and mud from his face. He stopped his hand. By God—Yes, he'd go back, back to the law school and the factory. Then the Kid could have a job that was mixed right. And he would make over his own life, and perhaps things would get better somehow for the men in the plant. He started for the ladder to tell the Kid they were going away from it all, right then; but he stopped, jerked tense by a sound. The clanking of the hay-fork had died and left in its place utter silence. Piercing the silence, as if a needle were passing through folded velvet, came a sharp, dry whistle, a monstrous abortion of a sound that tightened the skin on Tom's back, just as it had

tightened when that yellow-wheeled buckboard rolled down the road.

The whistle was lost in Pete's muffled roar: "Damn it, I tell you tain't right to send him up there. He's sicker'n hell!"

Amos' softly hissing voice cut as sharply as had his whistle: "Don't waste them swear words, Pete. And they ain't no sech word ez sick on this here place."

The hay-fork rattled Pete's blustering protest.

His shoe sliding in the hay, Tom tried to run to tell the Kid that he needn't work like this, that they were going away. "Hey, Kid!" he yelled; but Pete's clangs of the hay-fork drowned his voice. When Tom reached the top of the thirty-foot ladder down from the rafters to the barn floor, the Kid had stopped three-quarters of the way up, his right hand fumbling with terrifying helplessness at his head.

"O Kid!" Tom felt that he was only whispering: iron bands seemed to tighten around his throat and his chest, while for a half second the Kid's grip was loosening. Below, he could see a row of disc blades gleaming. The Kid's left arm straightened as his body jerked back from the ladder. Then one by one his fingers relaxed.

"Kid!" Couldn't he let the Kid know that he was going to take him away? It seemed that his own feet in their clumsy groping would never find the rungs of the ladder. And then—He wanted to scream—or laugh—It was a soft crunch, and he was miles above it.

He went the rest of the way down the ladder very

slowly. He was cold. He picked up the Kid, broken on the disc blades, and carried him to a pile of dirty sacks in the corner. The Kid tried to lift himself. Tom smiled at him and slid his arm under his shoulders. The Kid smiled back. "You all goin'" He choked. A warm drop of blood spattered on Tom's face. Then the deep blue of the Kid's eyes shallowed into a film.

"You fellers git back to work. And you, Mitchel, carry him to the bunkhouse." Amos' lips folded and a wasted "Nearer My God to Thee" groped its way out, then jerked to a stop, cut off by the madness that the sound wrought on Tom.

"What you laughin' at, Mitchel?"

"At you, you fool." As Tom stood up, Amos watched, and the life passed from his face; its wrinkles sagged into dead, grey pouches. Tom's left arm shot forward; his fingers groped, searching for a second in the muscles and flabby folds of Amos' neck; and clamped together as he bent him back. Amos' long arms thrashed wildly and his fingers tore at Tom's ear. It seemed to Tom as if the fingers were tearing at something outside him, at a steel helmet that covered the nerves of his head. Between two blurs of red, he could see Amos' blue lips folded into a ridiculously grotesque pucker. "Whistle," he panted in a great gasp; "whistle, oh damn you!" Then his fingers closed on something rough and hard, he saw his right hand holding a cordwood stick rise and fall twice and the puckered lips disappeared in a pulp of beaten flesh.

His hand relaxed, and he stood up, dropping the

stick. Pete was digging in the dust with the toe of his boot. Four of the men stood behind him, waiting to see what he would do. Tom wiped some blood from his eyes. Pete did not look at him. "Dig!" he growled. "They's a freight out of Moordon in a couple of hours. They'll look over there for you," he swung his arm to the east, "until—ez long ez I kin keep 'em at it."

Tom started down the road to the west, and he looked straight into its golden stretch for an hour. The world lay around him in the weird clearness and silence of a dream. But the world was dead: he was the only living thing in all the universe; and even in him, life was on the surface: within, he, too, was dead. The Kid was gone; Amos was gone. He cut again through the crackling stubble of a hayfield. Vaguely he wondered how the Kid and Amos would meet. Then he began to climb up rock slabs to the bluff above the river. A meadow lark, whirring in flight, welled into a melting flood of song that died with the last light of the sunset into a profound silence as Tom came to the ledge where he and the Kid had sat. Sitting there, he realized slowly that all his feeling was centered in the dull throb of his ear. He put his hand up. . . . He had no ear. . . . That did not matter. . . . So he sat very quiet until the moon had pushed up from the rim of the earth and slowly made its way through the multitude of stars, losing its red earthliness and turning to a pure radiance, under which the silver river gleamed, and the prairie sighed with the coming of night. Then when at last the moon hung

high, pale and almost still, he stripped off his clothes and stood up, stark and white, with a single streak of black cutting the side of his face and neck. Down there, the silver of the moon and the rush of the river mixed right. He stepped from the ledge. For an instant his body gleamed white against the grey face of the cliff as he dropped.

The Prairie Mother

By LEROY F. JACKSON

I. THE COYOTE

Another night, and that beast again
Out on the hills—cold hills and grey—
Tracking his prey.
Some poor, limp creature he will bring
Before the dawn, the wolfish thing,
To feed his den.

Screech, go on, you devil-child.
This cruel land, this empty sky
Will love your cry.
Scream out your soul to the idle stars,
Heartless Saturn and bloody Mars,
Vehement, wild,
A great world-agony set free.
Hell's high priest, trying loud and long
His ritual song;
A frantic witch, in pains of birth,
Mother of all the woes of earth:
These might it be—
Or a soul that the harpies of Hell are at.

God, if I only could scream like that!

II. SUNDAY

Evening comes creeping up quiet and grey,
Du-lu-lululy.
Rock a tired baby and put him away,
Du-lu-lululy.
Snow-babies born in the midst of the sky
Dance with delight as they all scurry by,
Du-lu-lululy.
No wonder they're glad as they fly thru the air,
It's Sunday, my boy, and they're going somewhere,
Du-lu-lululy,
Du-lu-lululy.

III. CHARLEY

This is the place where they put him last winter,
Charley, my baby,—he died in December.
Father and Flynn, and the dutchman called Ginter
Nailed up a box for him—how I remember!
A badger's been digging. I say it's a pity
The creatures can't keep off this one little spot
In the whole blessed land. O, he was so pretty
The day that they took him—so white he got,
Frozen like marble. I tucked in his blouse
The spools that he played with, and one of his
blocks,
And the only geranium there was in the house.
You don't think the badger can get at the box?

Fanning the Spark

A dun gloom seems to overcast the spirits of those who endeavor to persuade youth of the joy of writing out what is, supposedly, within. So darkling is this shadow in the land that I am moved to testify concerning a time and place where theme reading was an adventure and of cool academic corridors whose very air was as the breath of inspiration in my nostrils.

Have you noticed the group-personality? It is as unmistakable as the psychology of the crowd; and you encounter it at once, whether you set your foot upon the yielding pile which hushes the outer office of a great corporation or whether you flap through the fly-laden screen door of the little neighborhood grocery. Someone is at the head, whose reaction to life colors the reaction of each subordinate.

Unquestionably it was the Dean, who imbued the theme reading staff of the Department of English with the devotion of acolytes. My initiation into the order began with a day when he stepped upon the rostrum before his short story class wearing an expression of rapt gravity, and yet with a light of exultation in his eye. He began telling us of something significant to the world—"the birth of an artist."

The Department was honored, he said, by having among its members a senior student who had written a short story which the Dean considered a bit of genuine art. The story was soon to be published in

a magazine of the highest class, but far above this recognition, the speaker valued the fact that the story had been written with admirable technique, a sincere human sympathy, and possessed a vital theme.

I have been present at weddings, christenings, ordinations, and the laying of corner stones (all conceded to be fairly impressive events), yet upon no other occasion have I felt such a thrill of momentousness as upon that day.

After the class period the Dean requested me to remain for a private conference in the office; and when it developed that I was being offered the opportunity to become a theme reader, one of that group whose suggestions and guidance might help to produce other artists like the one of whom we had just been told, I felt myself humbly dedicated to a cause. Nor did this prove to be an evanescent mood, a temporary sentimentalism which evaporated with the actual experience.

Year followed year and I never took into my hand a packet of neatly folded white papers but there came to me that tingle of expectation. There was the certainty of page after page of youthful banalities, and still more youthful solemnities, and I knew that I should once more find proof that there are few things more amusing in life than an eagerly platitudinous freshman. Not amusing at all in a derisive sense, but quaintly funny, as a child is funny, and yet with how much greater scope of potentiality. Besides, there were the gleams. And with what ardor we fanned each spark of fancy, of sympathetic

understanding, or of a budding sense of the possibilities of language!

My pen always leaped at the chance to write upon a margin something like the following: "You do this especially well. Try other descriptions of like quality." Or, "This is an effective characterization. Can you write more in this line?" When the student floundered, unmistakably discouraged or even indifferent, the marginal note, "May we talk over your work between the hours of three and four in the Seminar Room?" brought to light unguessed struggles, and many times quite unsuspected capabilities.

I recall one student whose themes were a bewildering jumble, not one sentence completing the thought which it attempted to begin. How anyone who so muddled English could be in a university seemed utterly incredible. I shall not attempt to describe the youth when he sullenly pushed open the Seminar door for his first interview. He was having Freshman English for the same reason that he had had measles and whooping cough, because it was inescapable, but to his mind it answered no useful purpose under the sun. Any attempt to clarify the turgid tide of his antagonism seemed futile, until I bethought me how often in his themes had occurred the name of Lincoln.

That name was the talisman. His face lighted at the sound of it. He was not dull. He had a purpose. He had a hero. It was amazing how much he knew about Lincoln, but the writings of the great emancipator he had never read. He was a stranger to that marvelously simple, dignified, inspired Eng-

lish which is one of our most precious inheritances. When he went out into the corridor he was on his way to the library, and in two years from the time he sulked into the Seminar Room he was winning laurels in debate.

Of quite a different type, neat and pretty Miss Sixteen complied with every precept for writing to which she could lay her scrupulous pen, and achieved spotless page after page, without indicating the most microscopic germ of an idea. Accustomed to praise for her precocity, thanks to the feats of mere memory she could easily perform, the most gentle attempt to point out any deficiency in her work reduced her to tears.

Then, one day, as she sought material for a theme, she happened to meet an unspeakably ragged and dirty baby with a fist full of dandelions. As with eyes newly opened she not only looked, but saw. A sense of the contrasts of life, a glint of hidden meanings, had come to Miss Sixteen. She hurried home and wrote, for the first time.

To discover a world that palpitates with color is a delightful miracle. Many a Freshman has never seen how the path up a sunny hill can glow with a hazy rose, instead of clay color, or how the driveway through the park is shadowed with deep blue-purple, instead of being merely cinders and kerosene. Learning to be a word painter, youth is discovering not only its tools but its world.

The culture of this English garden set with rows of freshmen may become a pursuit of varied fascination, if each plant is encouraged to develop according to its kind. When I was considered fit to

administer first aid to the Short Story Class, with what solicitous care I bent above the fruits of the gardener's toil. For here was not merely promise but realization.

Occasionally there was need of intensive cultivation and then came added zest. I remember well the puzzled smile with which the Dean handed me a not too carefully written letter from a girl on a farm somewhere up in the north woods. She had heard of the Short Story Class; she wanted to write; she wanted to come. The most that she made plain was scant time, scanty funds, and emotion,—plenty of emotion. Said the Dean:

"Either she is a genius or a fool. I leave it to you to find out. Write her whatever you think best."

The girl came. Frail, tense, eager, with a beautiful but rather alarming flicker of pink in her cheeks, and an ambition that was like a consuming flame. She could not enter in the regular channels; I spoke of the work in Shakespeare. She thought not. She could only have a year, and she wanted all her strength for writing. I went to the Dean with the request that he admit her to the Shakespeare class. He also thought not. The girl was unprepared. Ultimately they both condescended, he to permit her to attend his lectures, she to permit him to lecture to her. The following week she met me with shining eyes. "When I think that I might have missed it!" she breathed. "It is like a new world." She was of those who "live by heart beats;" with every emotion her pen flew. Nowadays, when I read her fiction in the magazines, some-



times I write her a humble little note of appreciation.

But the greatest event of those stimulating years was THE story. Even to this day I think of it in capital letters, and I can not write of it otherwise. The author was a silent little Miss, with nothing to distinguish her except an unexpected light of fun in the depths of quiet brown eyes. Her themes had given us much satisfaction. She had originality, humor, and a most amazing power of observation. Now she was a junior, and in the Short Story Class.

With a pleasant sense of anticipation I unfolded the crinkling pages of her latest manuscript, one winter's night, when the hour had grown so late that no one but a theme reader would have looked upon the written page. Drawing my warm house robe about me, I leaned closer to the light and began to read. I smiled. I smiled again. I read more rapidly, while tingles of joyous approval ran quite to the ends of my otherwise chilly fingers. Half through the story I gathered my robes of state about me and ran down stairs. This was too good to keep all to myself. Everyone was asleep but my mother. Jubilantly I descended upon her and commanded her to listen. I went back to the beginning and read it all aloud, punctuating the sentences with chuckles, and ending the reading with the hilarious proclamation:

“This is the *real* thing!”

We tried not to let the writer know that we felt sure she had hit the bull’s eye, but when we advised her to submit the manuscript to the magazine of highest literary traditions, her astonishment may be

described as abysmal. She consented to commit such an audacity only because the Dean asked it of her. Two weeks later, she held out to him dumbly a letter of acceptance from the *Atlantic Monthly*. To his felicitations she finally replied. "What do you think they mean?" and she emerged from her daze of disbelief to go into a deeper trance of realization.

She had never been one to put thought upon externals, and well do I recall that she was wearing that year a huge hat, shaped like an inverted wash bowl. When disconcerting congratulation met her, she ducked her head and disappeared beneath her headgear, like a retiring toad under a burdock leaf. We endeavored to express our joy with considerate repression, but I am sure it was that huge hat, alone, which preserved her from being quite consumed by the ardor of our exultation. She had been so lately a Freshman and the world was still so astoundingly new!

After all, what more potent conjunction of words could be invented? Fresh Man! New fingers upon the bow. And though they will always play the same old themes, there is the finest essence of truth in what the Dean used to say:

"You have something to do that no one else can do."

Perhaps we little realized how simple and yet how profound was that observation.

The Midland

A MAGAZINE OF
THE MIDDLE WEST

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ANNOUNCEMENT

Attention is called to the fact that the address of the editor of *The Moon* is now
3010 Glencoe, Moon, Canada, Manitoba.
Manuscripts and other correspondence be-
yond the editor should be sent to the
new address.

This issue and the one preceding it have
been indexed because of the unusual interest
in them. The editor wishes to thank the
subscribers for their patience on this
matter.

The January issue will be the subscription
year at The Moon will be increased to
two dollars per year. It is bound at mid-
time to conform to the monthly rates of publica-
tion. All subscriptions, whether new
or renewal, received before the day men-
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The Midland

A MAGAZINE OF THE MIDDLE WEST

VOL. V SEPTEMBER—OCTOBER 1919 NOS. 9-10

The Road Runs Past

By MAHLON LEONARD FISHER

The road runs past that used to pause;
The tiny lane that led from it
Is filled with weeds, and lichen-writ
And runed the bars that no one draws.

The road runs past: it has forgot,
Meseems, the way it paused of old
To part the meadow's rippling gold,
Sun-ripened, from the pasture-lot.

It has forgot, and haply all
Who loved it have forgotten too,
With other things they loved and knew,
Beneath the grasses rank and tall.

The road runs past — is it because
The house is empty, day by day,
Behind the hill? . . . I only say —
The road runs past that used to pause.

Boot Hill Graveyard

By GWENDOLEN HASTE

The dead lie today
High on a fair hill
Swept by sweet breezes,
Shaded by softly shimmering trees.
Peacefully they lie there;
Around them spreads the shining valley;
Far away are the cool blue mountains.

But down in the flats,
On a gravelly sun-bitten slope
Lie the early dead.
Those dead that came when the land was new
And lived coarsely and died violently,
With their boots on,
And were buried in Boot Hill Graveyard.
There are no cherished flowers here,
No clipt lawns nor white marbles;
Only the sparse grass of the dry lands,
Rude slabs of sandstone,
Bare, sunken patches of ground,
Fierceness of the beating sun.

Oh you early dead,
You wild, rough pioneers,
You hairy, swaggering bad men of the west,
Are you not glad you lie here
Under the glaring sky,
With the gales hurling themselves over your broken
headstones
And the loco blossom springing from your graves?

Weaver

By LOUISE TOWNSEND NICHOLL

I met you once upon the road, Weaver,
Your tapestry of Beauty just begun.
I gave you all I had of color, only
A thread, but joyous when it caught the sun.
Dull-blue it was, I think, slender and stout,
But, as I gave, you told me you were glad,
Since this was such a color as you loved,
A little different from the ones you had.
Now you find color everywhere, Weaver.
Your tapestry has grown as Aprils pass,
And you have seen the violets' beauty make
A sweet, erratic pattern in the grass.
We do not meet again. But I am glad—
My thread was different from the ones you had.

Stepping Westward

By **BENJAMIN ROSENBLATT**

Up the harbor advances a steamer of the Canadian Immigrant Line to its landing place on the edge of the city. Watching it from the pier is a throng of people, some of whom have been waiting since break of day in a fever of suspense. The surf tosses and tumbles its spray: then subsides as the vessel is hauled in and made fast. The plank is laid across; and, as soon as the well-dressed have jauntily passed over, room is made for the steerage foreigners.

And forms uncouth, with faces wilted and withered, suddenly appear out of the under deck. The aged, as well as those on the threshold of life, betray curiosity, wide-eyed fear, palpitating anxiety.

A feverish element pervades the scene. There is a commotion among the bystanders, as one recognizes another. Many embrace, make attempts at speech more or less futile,—and, among this crowd, lost in the hurly-burly, stands a swarthy young woman with a child in her arms, casting fearful and distorted glances on the seething mass before her.

Like many of her fellow-passengers, she has come utterly worn out with her myriad woes, expecting to be met here by her husband to whom she may

finally outpour what she has endured. Sustained by this hope, she has accepted every humiliation without complaint. The wretchedness of the long voyage has been lightened by her faith in him. Her pulses, that surged so high during the landing as to cause her pain, now beat in an agony of dread, while she clutches her child closer, and looks imploringly at those about her.

She feels sure that her husband will appear before long. Where is he? Now and again her breath fails her, so vivid is her fancy that his true image is about to emerge from the crowd. Up and down the deck she begins to stride, enraged with animal fierceness. Time drags on, and the multitude is vanishing, mostly arm in arm.

"Only he, where is he?" escapes from her throat; and her face takes on a grimace of helplessness, and she tosses the whimpering baby in her arms, faltering: "Papa will come soon, dear. He will, he must,—you'll see he will soon be here."

The last words she utters indignantly, glancing about at the remaining passengers whom she has made her confidants on the way, and to whom she has imparted day by day her cheerful expectations.

But they are all engrossed with their friends, laughing now more freely. Presently she observes that they eye her with pity, and she turns to them sullenly: "My husband is late, but he is coming bye and bye." Her acquaintances propose to her to go with them, while they try to find her husband for her. This only makes her the more indignant; and

she follows them with flashing eyes, as they pass out into the street, hatred growing high in her heart. She is sure that their kindness was expressed only to irritate her.

"None of them will be left when he comes," rushes through her brain. No one will envy her happiness or participate in her joy. And how her heart yearns for him!

"Where is he?" a voice within her calls tremulously,—a cry that struggles for utterance, but which she tries to suppress.

Her acquaintances have all gone, and she becomes terror-stricken at the loneliness that suddenly extends itself around her. She is crowded from place to place, until she finds a remote corner and quietly seats herself upon one of her bundles. Automatically she puts her breast into the child's mouth, and bends her head low over it. There is a fold of her shawl against her lips, and she bites it fiercely between her teeth.

"Where do you wish to go?" asks one of the officers. The question is interpreted to her; and she pulls out a card, bearing the address of her husband. The officer undertakes to direct her, but she turns away, murmuring: "I will wait for him; he will come bye and bye."

The day has begun to die away. She has spent hours, gazing through the two iron gates that close the pier into the street where so many strangers walk, till her perceptions are dulled and her heart is

dead. She has ceased to rebel at her situation, but her lips have not ceased to say: "He will come, dear, he will come."

The last of the day dwindles and disappears. Evening gradually spreads over the harbor, and the men who at a distance push the loaded cart of baggage seem like shadows running to and fro.

Her eyes wander aimlessly through the dusk. Before her spreads the Hudson River, whence the multitudinous whistles of the boats,—some shrieking and piercing, others wailing and moaning, float on the night air, and far away, across the river, thousands of little fires are gleaming.

She sees through the gloom the surface of the water, livid and smooth. For a moment she sees the river rise, overflowing the bank and nearing her. She utters a feeble cry, and bestirs herself to drive away the vision.

Darkness all around. The noise of the baggage carts has ceased altogether. The vacuity of the huge pier seems to whisper in the silence, and to spread out immeasurably while she, sitting on her bundle in a remote corner, is growing smaller and smaller. The ships groan and howl; the lights on the opposite shore grow fainter and fainter; and the light in her eyes is extinguished with them. Her head bends lower on her breast, and her lips tremble to the form of the words, "He will come soon, he will come bye and bye."

Songs While the Leaves are Falling

By GLENN WARD DRESBACH

I

There is a slender tree that grows
Beside a road where people pass;
Through it a wind that chills it goes
And shakes its leaves upon the grass,
And I, who watched those same leaves grow
All fresh and green, and Summer long
Heard their young whispers and their song,
Then saw their golden passage, know
Two golden leaves are clinging now
Upon one little twisted bough
Half-hidden, and when winds are high
Two rustling golden banners fly,
Tiny, but bright against the gray
Of troubled skies that care not how
Leaves cling awhile or drift away.

When will these golden banners come
From their high place to join the dumb
And driven throng that moves with Death?
Each day I look with hurried breath,
And wish that they might wave and cling
To see the promise of the Spring.

And O, my Heart, so you may hold
Two Dreams that Life may turn to gold —
When all my other dreams must pass
Like leaves blown down upon the grass.

II

When once the bud has made the rose
It cannot be the bud again —
Its passion stirs, its glory grows
Beyond its being then.

So, Dream, since you the Real have made,
You cannot be the dream and rest —
For I have kissed her lips and laid
My head upon her breast.

III

The birds are flying to the South.
Their calls drift down the skies.
The song that trembled at my lips
Falls pierced with doubt, and dies.

The birds are flying South to trees
With green leaves brightly spread. . . .
Shall all my singing dreams leave me
When Youth is dead?

IV

If I had choice to be a tree
I would not be an evergreen,
Living with peaceful certainty,
 Seeing the same boughs I had seen
Since I had sprouted, always sure
My greenery would still endure
The change of seasons, never thrilled
With rapturous leaves, while nothing killed
But slow, dull Age. . . . O I would be
Any kind of growing tree
That knows the magic and the thrill
Of glowing leaves, that frost can kill
Only by turning them to gold.
O I would stand with branches bold
Braving the winds until again
The benediction of warm rain
Fell on the earth, and song came up
From all my roots, and I could sup
And dine with all the gods of Earth,
And fear no death, grown wise in birth.

V

The man may be the child again
When Autumn winds in shadow moan,
And the cold rains beat the window pane
 And a heart feels all alone.

I will not bear this loneliness,
This madness, this unrest—
I shall go out and gently press
The dead leaves to my breast.

VI

What is this voice that calls
Like a dream in the night,
Bringing thoughts that are flushed
All rosy-bright.

The voice says, “I am the love
That came in the Spring,
And whispered until you lived
In my whispering.

“I am the love that took
The wrinkles from your brow.”
And I answer the voice in the night,
“It is Autumn now.

“And I hear the whisper of leaves
That fade, and silently
The dark clouds pass. . . . Be gone—
Or comfort me!”

VII

Drunken fellows, all together
Let us dance away,
Gold leaf, yellow leaf,
And leaf all crimson-gay,—
We are drunken with the World
That bids us on our way.

Drunken fellows, all together
Let us outward fare
With a chuckling madness
Through the frosted air —
Now the World is through with us
Show we do not care!

The Quest

By AGNES MARY BROWNELL

“Hear you’re goin’ to leave us, Eddie — young blood, young blood — must go adventuring!” cackled old Johnny Meek, shaking his popper over the blaze with a practiced hand. Old Johnny had raised the humble calling of pop-corn vender almost to the dignity of a profession; he had a fine, shining, glass-enclosed cart which displayed his commodities to the best advantage, and a little hopper constantly jangling with coins of the smaller denominations. Old Johnny Meek had on a time been young and adventuresome himself, and had come home a crippled pop-corn vender.

"What—Eddie going away? That's new! Not crossed in love, are you Eddie?"

A short, stocky, good-natured young fellow with the color of a girl, his bulky figure looking somehow quite trim in its enveloping apron—he was Willy Gentry, head clerk in Gregg's Grocery—stopped on his errand across the street, and laid a broad and friendly arm about the slender shoulders of the young man whose movements seemed to be of enough importance temporarily to suspend traffic in the little main street.

Eddie Pease good-naturedly shook off the imputation. He disliked to be called "Eddie". He reflected that he would be gone long enough for them to forget that he had ever been "Eddie". "Honorable Eddie Pease"—how it would sound. "Pease" was bad enough—what a terrible irony that the Peases' should be market-gardeners! Well, he couldn't get away from the name, but he could give up the calling. He stood there thinking these things and saying nothing, smiling constrainedly.

The market-garden was on the edge of town. His polished shoes became gray the moment he left the paving. He saw his mother and sister Emma working in one of the beds. His sister wore an enormous sun-bonnet, a faded cotton sacque and bloomers; it was very hot and dirty work. Eddie changed quickly and went about his share; he was leaving next morning; that afternoon he had gone up town to draw money for the journey. But tonight he would leave nothing undone.

They ate silently; his brother had hired a new man to take Eddie's place — this was his first meal with them. The men ate stolidly, but Eddie noticed that his mother and sister scarcely touched their food. His sister Emma spoke sharply to her mother out of her anxiety, urging her in an undertone. The mother dutifully picked up her fork which shook in her hand; she was a small, dark woman, whose hair had not turned gray; under this cap of sleek, low-growing black hair, her face looked shrivelled — all cut into lines like a face carved on a nut; and her eyes which had been brown had faded out, like fabric too much washed; now they looked curiously dark, like stuff under water.

After supper Eddie set about the watering, but his brother good-naturedly took the hose from him — "Come — come, now! Don't you want to see someone? It's your last night!"

Eddie thought; whom should he see? Suddenly he felt quite romantic — he would call upon Marcia Kirk. He had only the friendliest feeling for Marcia whom he had known always. He had never even thought of her as pretty; he had not thought of her at all. But there was something pleasant in the idea of seeing her before he went.

He washed up at the sink in the kitchen; his sister was there, setting sponge for bread. He splashed frightfully, sending the water in little rills down her clean oil-cloth. When he had gone, she didn't even wipe the splashes away, though she had been used to scold him for less. She went into the sitting-room where her mother was sitting at a window.

"What's he doing?" asked the mother.

"Washing. I guess mebbe he's going out."

"Are you through?"

"Yes — it's all done, and the bread set."

"I mean — his clothes —"

"Yes; that is, John took the old socks and gave me his box of new ones for Eddie. Shall I light the lamp, mother?"

"Not yet. When'll he be down?"

"He's coming now."

"Light it."

Eddie came into the light blinking. He had on his new suit, but he was turned out in such manner as only a man's own women folk can effect; his linen had the fresh sweetness distilled from the domestic tub. In the presence of his mother and sister he felt somehow less heroic, but he managed to say casually:

"Guess I'll go over to Kirks' awhile."

"Marcy Kirk's a good girl," approved his mother.

However Emma could not forbear a slight sniff, as her brother disappeared. What if Marcia Kirk was a good girl — what had she ever done for Eddie?

The Kirks' lived a little way up the street, in a square house with a vine enclosed porch. Eddie knocked; and Marcia's sister Ida came to the door. Ida was older than Marcia, and Eddie had always furtively admired her. He thought her very handsome; she was tall, rather plump, and of a dashing dark type. She was so near him that he could see

the little gold freckles in her white skin, and her lashes with their bold upward curve. Still he seemed not at all to wish to see her.

"Marcy in?" he asked awkwardly.

Ida's eyes, her curved lashes and her golden freckles, seemed to laugh up at him.

"Marcy! You're wanted!" she called down the narrow, dusky hall.

Marcia came toward him through the dark entry. He thought she was like a picture in a narrow frame. He did not remember ever to have taken her hand before, but this was different. Her fingers were moist; she had been wiping dishes, and had hurried to throw off her apron when she heard his voice.

They sat in the porch which was like a sweet, green room. In the dusk the vines were like a wonderful tapestry where the leaves seemed to move. After all, when he had seen her, there seemed to be little to say. Young folks have no old times to talk of, and the future was only a pleasant blank. They were neither of them imaginative. Presently he rose to go. Again he felt her fingers, soft, cool and moist in his palm; her face was a white blur. He had the strangest feeling of not wishing to go away after all; he began to say something of this—it was all rather incoherent. And suddenly he knew that what he wanted most of all was just to kiss her.

A heel clicked on the Kirk walk. Eddie dropped the hand. What madness had assailed him—almost to commit himself before his quest was even begun? He said awkwardly, "Well, good-bye, Marcy!"

By this time the intruder had reached the porch. It was Willy Gentry. Eddie felt a sudden surge of gratitude toward him; he wrung his hand warmly, and went down the walk. He heard Marcia say, "I think Ida went over to Shaws'; I'll call her."

"No you don't, Sister Annie!" boomed the voice of Willy Gentry. Eddie remembered to have heard his sister Emma speak of Willy's calling at the Kirks'; he continued to have the liveliest feeling of gratitude toward Willy; he regarded him almost in the light of a preserver.

They were up betimes next morning. His mother and sister showed an almost frantic haste. It struck him that it was a rather unusual breakfast — so many good things; the surprising thing was, that he felt no desire for food. His brother John ate steadily through the meal; the new man went about it in rather a furtive and apologetic manner; his sister Emma eyed the two resentfully, switching from table to stove. Eddie felt a little sullen flame; they seemed to be afraid he might miss his train. How could he know that the mere going is a greater wrench than absence. One becomes reconciled to that.

His brother John drove him to the train in the vegetable wagon, and the last thing he saw was the humped, white tarpaulin which covered the produce. His good-bye to his mother and Emma seemed a blank. A dull anger rose in him. Where was gone all that joy of anticipation? Was it only a will-o'-the-wisp to mock him?

There was a family sitting across the aisle; from the conversation he knew they were returning from California; there were children—the younger ones very fretful and uneasy. It transpired that their lunch had given out—at the next stop they would purchase more.

Eddie opened the box Emma had given him; everything was wrapped in napkins of white tissue; the peculiar, boxed-up odor of packed food was diffused. He was not of fine sensibility—he never noted the cloying odor—but he could not have touched a morsel. He could see Emma spreading the bread and turning the bacon in the pan; he remembered his mother in her chair, stirring and stirring the cake batter. A sort of film came over his eyes; he almost forced the box into his neighbors' hands. "Take—take!" he muttered. Perhaps the woman saw—mother of five; she did not offer him pay; but later her husband came over and talked with him largely and enthusiastically of the West.

At the noon stop he got out and went into the depot restaurant where he ate ravenously—baked beans in little ramekins, coffee and doughnuts. He felt better—almost like himself.

He began to think with his old anticipatory pleasure of his meeting with Fred Ladd. It was owing to Fred that he was going to the city. Fred had played in the band that had been engaged during fair week the previous year. Eddie had fallen in with him, for he, too, on occasion, tooted a dismal cornet. Fred had dwelt knowingly upon the life of

cities. From an inner pocket, Eddie drew a late communication from him. It was optimistic, if somewhat vague in tone. The note reflected its author. Fred himself, awaiting his friend in the station, was revealed as a good-natured, irresponsible youth in cheap clothes of extreme cut. He piloted the country boy knowingly across the city, and they came after an interminable street-car ride to the Ladds' domicile — an obscure little frame. Mrs. Ladd gave him a warm and motherly welcome — she herself had been a country girl, and she had not outgrown the country way. She was of a comfortable and complacent bulk, and she wore gray calico beneath a white apron with an ornate knitted edge.

"This is my daughter, Maud," said Mrs. Ladd, drawing the girl forward. She put her hand, not in his but straight forward with a little groping movement and then he saw that the girl with large, dark, wide-open eyes, was blind. Mr. Ladd came home at supper-time; he was employed in the shoe department of an uptown store. He was one of that pitifully large class — the waifs of a city — who are by nature the small town type.

Eddie accompanied him next morning, but there was no vacancy in all the great store, nor apparently in the city. Never had he ached so after a day in the sun in the truck garden. He was ashamed to return to the Ladd's at night, but a terrible homesickness drove him. There was no lack of warmth and encouragement there; the blind face of Maud lit up at his coming; she began to talk to him happily in her

curiously even voice. Mrs. Ladd had biscuits and honey for supper—the sweet, hot food put courage into him. Fred proposed that he come along to band practice; there might be a chance there—at least a transient engagement to tide him over.

The leader gave him scant attention; but at a certain passage—a sort of cadenza—he suddenly indicated the hapless Eddie—"You blay him!"

Eddie stared a frozen instant at the passage; desperate impulse urged him on. At the conclusion, amid silence, the German addressed the company—"Vell, he did it; only he didn't blay it in der righdt key." He did not ask Eddie to return.

There ensued a terrible week of wandering. He had no money, and always at night, in shame and desperation, he returned to the Ladds'; and always Maud's blind face greeted him with more than any light of eyes; and always Mrs. Ladd urged on him the hot and savory expression of her welcome. Fred played daily in the parks, and Mr. Ladd, smelling faintly of leather, opined that next day something would surely turn up.

One night when he returned, at first they did not recognize him. At last he had found work—as a day laborer with a paving gang. He had not even enough to pay for his laborer's garb whose crass blue was already dulled with earth strains, and dank with perspiration. He had left his suit for surety. Mrs. Ladd heated water, and he filled a tub in the wash-house; when he had dressed in some of his older belongings, he felt like one who had come up out of bondage.

This feeling was heightened when scrupulously every week he paid Mrs. Ladd. From this revenue, which they termed the "board money", Mrs Ladd was sometimes enabled to extract a bit of finery for Maud — ribbon for her hair, or fresh flummery for her hat. Maud took a naive delight in these things and their source, as conscious of them in truth as any girl would be in the wearing — for who when abroad, can see her own head? Eddie, too, derived a peculiar pleasure by reason of his share in his little blind friend's adornment. A certain dull, bright ribbon that she wore — the peculiar red of the stems and veins in the homely leaves of the rhubarb in the old garden, gave him the queerest pleasurable sensation. The very literalness of the impression made it the more poignant. That was how he began to talk to Maud about the garden. It was as if, after the broiling day, the shield-like glitter of the earth-polished spades, the endless lifting of shovels full of dirt, they two repaired to a garden of dull, green, growing things. It was not imagination, but a terrible literalness that made him see her white face blurred into the likeness of the moon-flowers in his mother's garden.

Sometimes on Sundays they went to the amusement park where Fred played — the elder Ladds contemplating in proud complacency the band-stand and the uniformed players; Eddie and Maud on a neighboring bench munching peanuts and chatting, neither attentive nor oblivious to the music which flowed past them like the murmuring of a pleasant

stream. Maud's blind face on such occasions took on a vivid luminousness. Her wide hat with the bright hued flowers, dipping a little under its trimming, shadowed her dark, wide-open eyes; a faint color lay over her cheeks. Once a chance passer-by observed lightly to his companion, "That's a pretty girl — such great eyes!" "He means you!" whispered Eddie, delightedly. "He means me!" said Maud; and bridled with the charming insolence of a petted child.

He had heard from home; and he would have written oftener, except for shame and pride; he promised himself that when his fortunes improved, he would write home every week. The first time he read the name of Marcia Kirk in his sister's letter, the name seemed to leap up at him like a little flame. Emma wrote in her stilted manner that it was reported that Willy Gentry was waiting upon Marcia. Eddie did not reply to this letter; he did not wish to know about Willy and Marcia, and he reflected that Emma, awaiting his reply, would be deterred from writing for a time. It was some weeks before he heard again, and then there was no direct mention of Marcia. Emma wrote, "Willy's house is about finished. I guess the wedding will be soon now. I never see them — I never see anybody, or go anywhere. It's work all the time."

The next letter, when Eddie took it up from his dresser, where Mrs. Ladd always placed his mail, seemed in the very feel of it to be fraught with significance. Enough time had elapsed for any hap-

pening. That envelope, of flimsy texture, and smudged along its sealed edge, seemed to contain a very missive of fate. He decided not to open it till after supper, and dropped it into his upper drawer.

After supper, he read to Maud. She was passionately fond of a certain type of stories — love stories with happy endings. She was knitting a strip of crimson silk; her white fingers were streaked with the slender threads, and above her thin hands with their silken burden, her large, brown, sightless eyes were fixed in the direction of his voice.

When he got up to go — “Making something pretty?” he asked, clumsily fingering the pliant silk.

She snatched it to her with a little hiding movement. “O—you musn’t look!” she cried. She patted his sleeve, smiling up at him archly and tenderly, as an older person sometimes smiles at a meddlesome little boy.

When he had gone upstairs again, he looked down at the letter, lying unopened in the drawer. He wished now that he had opened it at once, when he found it staring up at him from the dresser. He felt less than ever like opening it now; so he went to bed; and all next day, working in the broken road, he planned what the letter must contain. Still at night, all that added burden of suspense went into the substance of the letter. If he could have been told! but to open the envelope, unfold the paper, search out the words! If he could hear the words, there would be nothing but silence to follow; but to see them — the written words — they would con-

tinue to be present before him — the very place where they were written on the sheet. The dreadful literalness of his mind that made things not imagined but actual, read the words through their flimsy covering.

He struck a match, and touched it to a corner of the unopened letter; the flame spread bluely, leaving a black char with crimson edges. When it approached his fingers, he dropped the blazing paper into his water pitcher — it made a sizzling noise; a fragment of black tissue floated on the surface; and he had disposed of Emma's news.

The next morning he felt a curious elation — the nearest approach to the old adventurous glamour; it suddenly occurred to him that he need not return to the slavish work with the paving. He dressed carefully, as for a Sunday park excursion with Maud and her parents. The Ladds' were all sympathy and optimism. The fall season was approaching; the slack time was nearly over. Mr. Ladd, himself rather gray and leathery like a scuffed shoe, brightened up wonderfully as sponsor for Eddie's new venture, and the two of them went off blithely together, Mrs. Ladd and Maud waving from the door.

As it chanced, there was extra work connected with a consignment of goods just arrived, which was being unpacked in the basement of the department store where Mr. Ladd was employed. And here was Eddie — right at hand and vouched for by an old trustworthy employee. Fortunately, the basement work demanded no great skill of computa-

tion; and Eddie in his Sunday clothes opening boxes and arranging their contents, displaying the utmost good-humor and willingness to serve, made an excellent impression. The novelty of his position that first day had something almost theatrical about it; the artificial lights, the girl clerks, looking curiously dressed-up, the stream of customers, mostly women bargain hunters, kept his mind on the alert. There was one girl whom they called "Dolly"—so tiny—with a face so rounded, so colored, so framed in with dark curls, as to resemble one of the brown haired dolls displayed in long pasteboard boxes in the toy section. Eddie thought she was quite the prettiest thing he had ever seen; he looked at her a great deal; he observed enviously the free-masonry among the other clerks—they were Minnie and Hazel; Jimmie and Scootie to each other. The last named, an amiable youth who seemed to have taken Eddie under his protection, observing the direction of the new clerk's glances, proposed generously: "Want to meet her?" and presently Eddie found himself taking part in a small ceremony—"Miss Pettit—make you acquainted with Mr. Pease."

Miss Pettit, looking more than ever like a life-sized doll, acknowledged the formality with a perky movement of the head as if a string had been pulled somewhere within the doll's mechanism, and observed pleasantly:

"Call me Dolly."

He retorted daringly: "Call me Eddie, and I will!"

He accompanied her to her car at closing time and handed her elegantly up the steps, his fingers under her elbow. Through the car window she looked for all the world like a doll in a glass case. But strangely, in recounting the events of his day to the Ladds, he never mentioned dolls.

By the end of the week they were very well acquainted. Saturday night, after the late closing, when his poor Dolly was so tired that her round, brown eyes kept blinking as if some bit of mechanism were out of order, he patted her hand awkwardly and said: "Well—good-bye, Doll—till Monday."

"Till Monday?" asked Dolly, making her eyes very round.

It had actually never occurred to Eddie that he could see her between times. He had come to consider that his evenings and his Sundays belonged to the Ladds', just as his days belonged to the store.

"What's the matter with Sunday?" asked Dolly, laughing in her jerkiest, most doll-like manner.

"Sundays—" stammered Eddie; "why—Sundays—we go to the park."

"So do I," returned Dolly, carelessly; "when I'm asked!"

"Me and the Ladds,'" blundered Eddie unhappily, thinking of Maud.

"Ladds!" said Dolly. "You mean that little old dried-up leather man in the shoes? Perhaps there is a Miss Ladd!"

"Only Maud," pleaded Eddie.

"O—only Maud!" It would be impossible to reproduce the way in which Dolly pronounced the words, "only Maud." As one would say of an unexpected legacy, "only a million."

"She's blind," said Eddie.

The round, brown doll-like eyes regarded him steadily out of the softly colored contours of the doll-like face; if they could no more change expression than the crystal eyes of the dolls in the show cases, could one blame the dolls for that? She began slowly to move away.

It was a long time before Eddie won her reluctant consent to accompany him on the morrow. That foolish, literal habit of mind of his which had come to associate Sunday with the small festivity of the Ladd's Sunday dinner and Sunday excursion—Maud in some specially prized finery stored up against this day, and the elder Ladds looking modestly prosperous—had almost lost him Miss Petit's regard. Finally in a sort of weary petulance, she surrendered her address—1125 Vine.

But after he had got home that night, he remembered the Ladds fast enough. He went to sleep, trying to frame a casual, off-hand excuse for Sunday afternoon. Next morning when he saw Mrs. Ladd putting the potatoes into cold water and Maud smoothing the Sunday cloth with her knowing hands, he knew he could never partake of that sacrificial feast. He suddenly blurted out:

"I—I—got an engagement!"

Mrs. Ladd dropped in the last potato. "Engage-

ment?" Then she bethought her of the mournful cornet and the band. "That's nice; we'll come to hear you."

"With a lady," said Eddie, unhappily.

He saw Mr. Ladd looking at him over the Sunday paper; Fred, who had been polishing his boots on the kitchen steps, stopped whistling and surveyed him with a long and comprehending wink.

Maud went on smoothing the cloth, and her face as she turned it toward him, was full of a sweet invitation—"You can stay to dinner, can't you, Eddie?"

"No," said Eddie; which was literal truth; he could not bring himself to that.

So he ate his dinner in a cheap little restaurant, and loathed every mouthful; and with every mouthful he felt a happy elation. Then he walked lonesomely up and down the streets, and as early as he dared he took Dolly's car.

1125 Vine was a little frame and latticed house; it had a porch and a vine like a house back home; and in a swinging seat, looking wonderfully pretty and fluffy and expensive, like a prize doll at a bazaar, sat Dolly.

No one disturbed them. The vined porch seemed to be Dolly's own domain. For a time, a clatter as of the cleansing of Sunday dishes, sounded distantly; and the thud, thud, of stocking feet in a rocker came from a room off the tiny entry. Eddie would have asked nothing better than this green and gold retreat, like a little room hung with a pleasant pattern of chintz; but Dolly leaned to a promenade and the kaleidescopic glitter of the Sunday park.

It was all a gallant and wonderful dream to Eddie; and, as in a dream, late in the afternoon they came upon the Ladds' sitting in their usual place not far from the band-stand. Fred, for a wonder, was with them, looking very fine in his gray and gilt. It was Fred who had called out, "Well—if here isn't Eddie! Face the music, Eddie. Stand and deliver!"

Eddie was so flustered he actually couldn't recall their names in the introductions; but presently he found himself saying, "And this is Maud." Maud extended her hand in her pretty groping fashion, with her lifted face in the direction of his voice. Eddie thought he had never seen a look so blind and yet so seeing. He wished he had not looked at Maud. And presently in a queer way he found them all strolling together, with Dolly and Fred ahead, and Maud with him. After they had walked a little way, Maud asked, anxiously: "Is she pretty, Eddie?"

"I think so," said Eddie.

"Then I shall think so, too," said Maud with pretty positiveness.

He told Dolly about it when he said good-bye in the green and gold chintz porch (only now the colors were more sombre). "How funny!" said Dolly, in her little jerky, doll-like fashion.

Fred dropped into the department store several times the following week, presumably attracted by the Basement Bargains. Fred, in civilian clothes, lost in comparison with his Sunday uniformed ap-



pearance, being distinctly short and stocky, deficiencies less apparent in military garb. The next Sunday was Maud's birthday — the birthday came midway in the week, but its celebration was deferred till Sunday. Eddie, in great secrecy, sought Mrs. Ladd anent the matter of a suitable gift on the occasion of a lady's birthday.

Mrs. Ladd's reply was most amazing; she said promptly, "Red roses." But she added hastily, "Not the expensive kind, Eddie, with the long stems. Maybe you think it's kind of foolish of Maud — and flowers so perishable — but you asked me, so I tell you."

"Red roses!" repeated Eddie; "red roses. She shall have them, stems and all!"

It was decided to make a little party of it and invite Dolly. Dolly accepted with one of her little doll-like ejaculations — "How nice!" Fred went up to the car line to meet her; Eddie was helping put an extra leaf in the table; he had been helping all morning. In his old literal way he saw the day only as Maud's birthday, and his sole thought was its success. The roses had been delivered early by a boy on a wheel from the florist's. Eddie had staged everything; he had Maud on the porch as the boy rode up, dismounted and came up the steps with the green pasteboard box.

"Miss Maud Ladd?" read the boy, inquiringly.

"This is the lady," said Eddie, beaming.

"O — O —" breathed Maud, taking the box in her pretty, groping hands.

"Let me help you," offered Eddie; "sort of a knot here."

He lifted the lid. What are asphodels but the fabled roses of paradise? Maud stood in her little Garden of Eden with its sagging floor where the posts were rotting, and smelled her heavenly roses. They were like red torches lighting up her darkness.

"Red roses!" breathed Maud. She looked at Eddie, and she looked at her roses, seeing them both with some deeper, spiritual insight beyond the ken of seeing mortals. Eddie was never to forget that look kindled by his rose torches.

They put the roses on the dining-table for a center-piece, and magically they transformed the little square room, with its worn rug and dingy paint, into a banquet chamber. They might have been in a rose garden. Dolly exclaimed, some strange human string tugging in her little artificial being—"Red roses! How dear!"

The dinner was a masterpiece executed by Mrs. Ladd in such homely mediums as flour and sugar and green things, and a fowl from the poult erer's. And a strange and ineffable flavor was imparted thereto—the very spirit of an essence—outside the province of any cook-book. The red roses were like wonderful candelabra in which burned perfumed candles, and the guests about that table were as though they lived for that day in another world—not a world of leather nor of cheap basement commodities, nor one of many pans and pots soaking now in warm water, so that they would come clean

easily; or if these things were of their world, they were only its outer ramparts.

It was so late when they had done Maud's birthday dinner that Mrs. Ladd only stacked the dishes on the kitchen table and they hurried for their car. The park was like a great shifting kaleidoscope. Fred attended Dolly, and went tardily to the bandstand. Then they walked, Eddie with a girl on either arm; or they sat awhile on the benches and listened to the music and amused themselves pretending to distinguish Fred's horn.

Fred came back at the earliest possible moment, looking very military in his gray and gilt; he and Dolly made a very good-looking couple. Eddie felt no restraint — rather gratitude. He thought only one thing — that this was Maud's birthday. This very simplicity of his in the end defeated him. Dolly could not understand it; if Eddie had showed displeasure at Fred's attention, she would have left him happily alone; but Eddie evinced only the most placid content at being left to Maud. When it was time to go,—“Take me home, Eddie!” she commanded; ‘I’ve hardly seen you today!’” she complained a little later in the green and gold chintz porch.

How pretty she was, sitting in a corner of the swing, with a tiny foot extended, shod in a buckled sandal like the bronze paper slippers of the dolls in the store; one arm was thrown up behind her little head where the loosened hair waved like shadow tresses; one hand groping along the seat touched

Eddie's. Eddie took up the little hand — what was one such little hand? He put up his arm and reached the other, drawing it gently down. Her round, brown, crystal eyes were half veiled now — but how much more meaning in those veiled eyes! Who can know what is behind white lids?

"Kiss me!"

Had Dolly's lips moved? Did her eyes invite? Was it a whisper? Night noises are very deceiving. But even as Eddie's lips touched hers, as in some horrid magic the green and gold chintz room vanished; there was only a latticed porch with some of its palings gone, great ropes of vines that had a weedy smell, a dizzy swing hung from clanking chains, and a small, common little creature like a cheap doll, reduced to a bargain figure by reason of some defect.

There came to him as he flung down the walk a sudden memory of Marcia Kirk on that last night at home, her face pearl-like in the dark shadow of her hair. For all the burnt letter and the gaping correspondence with his sister, Emma—his mother's eyes were too filmed by reason of the cataracts growing over them, to permit their use at such close work as writing — he had not been able to forget the girl. Sometimes as he had sat with Maud as it grew dusk and her face peered out whitely like a flower of his mother's morning glories, he had half fancied he was home again and that the dusk was the green gloom of Marcia's porch.

He began to walk westward, away from the city,

with no set purpose but only to go. The trolleys clanged past and motor cars glared redly, but he met few pedestrians. After a long time he brought up against a garden.

It was the garden of a suburban home. The house, a handsome one of brick, but of an older era, crowned an incline, and a broad driveway came curving down through too thick shrubbery. Eddie could see the outlines of an arched summer-house with the overgrown garden crowding close to its door. It was not enclosed; the grounds were terraced to the pavement, but a sort of balustrade of stone was set for a little space at this end.

Eddie dropped down upon this narrow settle and stared out into the dark garden. In the night, with its tall grass, its lurking blooms and its overgrown shrubberies, it might have been a thicket. He sat there a long time.

Suddenly a voice said: "Were you lost, Pan? Would you find your way back?"

It was a mocking voice — hardly unpleasant, but with a natural harshness of timbre. Eddie, looking toward the place whence the voice issued, saw a woman in white, wing-like draperies move out from a garden seat behind a thick curtain of shrubs. She was neither young nor old.

"I — never meant — to intrude," muttered Eddie, rising.

"Not at all," said the lady; "I am fond of reading. I have been reading you for a long time. The city has not been kind. What do you think of my garden?"

"It needs pruning," said Eddie.

"Alas!" said the lady, advancing into the open drive-way which the thrown shadows of the branches made to resemble checkered marble. "These barbarians who are to be had for hire, destroy rather than preserve — so it must needs grow wild. Could you tame my garden for me, Pan?"

"She must be touched," thought Eddie. "She talks like a book." But he said:

"Back home we had a market garden and an orchard; and mother had her flowers. You got to know how, is all — and then it takes work."

"'Work'!" mused the lady. "'And you got to know how!' Since you know how, would you work in my garden, Pan?'"

"My name's Ed," said Eddie, stiffly; "Edward Pease. Do you mean you want I should come and take care of your garden?"

"Just that!" said the lady.

Here was luck! How could he go back to the basement bargains and the dreary stock and Dolly and the rest? He wanted to forget everything — even the Ladds — and here, at last, he belonged. This was his place — the kind earth and growing things. "I'll come," said Eddie.

"There's a room in the coach-house you may have; it's all fitted up. There are things there, too — working clothes."

"I must tell the Ladds!" said Eddie, suddenly.

"The Ladds?" questioned the lady.

"Where I lived," said Eddie, speaking as of some

remote past. "And get my things." Eddie's belongings scarcely filled one shallow drawer of the Ladds' spare-room dresser.

"Doubtless they can wait," suggested the lady, smiling.

"I will write to them," decided Eddie, after a moment's uneasy thought. He shrank from bidding them good-bye — Mr. Ladd, with his leathery wrinkles, and Mrs. Ladd, with her undaunted cheerfulness and bustle, and Maud, with her lovely, sightless eyes; and even Fred, though he was now seldom at home.

"My name is Miss Avery," said the lady. "And now, good-night. In the morning we will plan where best to begin."

Eddie started toward the coach-house where a pale light bulb swung and gleamed, but turned back.

"How did you know?" he questioned.

"Know?" said the lady.

"About — me —" said Eddie.

"I told you," said the lady, a little impatiently, "I am a great reader; I read faces. I read yours. Good-night."

The next day Eddie dispatched his note to the Ladds. It was very brief — the literal expression of a literal mind:

"I got a place working in a Garden," wrote Eddie. "The lady's name is Miss Avery. How it come about was, I was walking and came to it, and she was sitting and seen me. So I hired out to her and no more at this time.

Resp.,

"EDDIE PEASE.

"P. S.—I forgot to say, would you just pack up my things and I'll call for them. Tell Maud hello."

He felt better, this accomplished, and set to work full of assurance. He had had his interview with Miss Avery; by day in stiff white linen, she looked even older—darker and plainer—and her curiously harsh voice had a sort of metallic click. He detailed to her his conception of what her garden should become, and she listened critically, with only an occasional word. He did not perceive that she was continuing to read him. He saw a woman of a certain height and elegance of build and with a plain, harsh face—an employer, who had a piece of work to be done; and himself, a hired laborer. She saw a youth of the most elemental simplicity—entirely practical, unimaginative, but with a literalness of mind so extraordinary as to make him see everything in symbols; he had a sort of pagan, old-world simplicity, like that of the old world gods; added to this too perfect beauty. Eddie Pease, humble tiller of the soil, without other gifts beyond the most mediocre, had received the doubtful one of pulchritude. Every line of his face, every curve of it, the very set of the head on noble shoulders, was as they had been moulded by some master artificer.

Eddie worked in the garden, clearing away, pruning and transplanting. He had never felt so thoroughly at home since coming to the city. Even the Ladds, kind as they had been, lived the life of grubs. Here he was among his kind; the branches reached out to him like arms, the shrubs began to glow with

homely berries, and the flowery kin of his mother's garden nodded their bright heads at him. He put off going to the Ladds'; perhaps he feared the mute reproachfulness of Maud's blind eyes.

Miss Avery maintained a sort of state in her huge and antiquated house, which had been part of an estate. On Sundays she entertained at solemn family dinners — her brother's family from the city, and various elderly cousins — all of a sober grenadier type. They dined richly and heavily in mid-afternoon, and afterwards sat in the great porches, coming down later into the garden which had begun to take on a certain symmetry. But through the week the house was sunk into a sort of solitude. Two elderly servitors occupied the basement rooms — the woman plodding through her ancient round, her husband assisting, and caring for the horses. Miss Avery kept a carriage. Sometimes Eddie drove her into town. He understood horses, too, for they had horses back home as well as the garden and the orchard. Once when Eddie had drawn up to a curb in the business part at Miss Avery's bidding, a young and vivid girl, too smartly dressed, pushed open the glass entrance doors of a store directly opposite. She stared at Eddie; the stare widened to a smile; she half spoke. Eddie stolidly touched his hat and looked away. The girl was Dolly.

"O, by the way," began Miss Avery that evening; she had come down to see the fountain; it was an old fountain which had been almost overgrown with reedy grass, its base cracked by pushing roots. Ed-

die had restored it, and the water splashed pleasantly from its basin and spray blew out like a fragment of silver veil.

"Who was that girl?" asked Miss Avery, carelessly.

"Her name is Pettit," answered Eddie.

"She is pretty," said Miss Avery. "Did you know her very well, Pan, out there in the world?"

"I used to know her," said Eddie, with finality.

"And you thought her pretty?" persisted Miss Avery.

Eddie considered honestly. He answered out of his dreadful literalness, "She looks like a doll in a show-case."

This reply seemed oddly to please his mistress. "I can see—you don't care for dolls. Some men do."

She sat on a marble seat and looked at her fountain. The seat and the fountain had come to the garden many years before; they had all been young together—the house and the fountain and the bench; and the garden only a beginning; the woman, too, had been young. Now the garden only was green and lovely, but the house had a sort of dignity—narrow, tall, and of a sombre red, it had preserved the traditions of an older generation. And the stain on the bench and the fountain gave them a mellow look—as if they had lived. Only the woman had subtly lost in the ageing.

She drew a thin silk scarf about her head; her feet rested on the marble base; her dress flowed

about her and in the stillness its folds resembled folds in sculpture; her arm lay curved along the seat and her hand, half concealed by a silken fringe, might have been a sculptured hand. She might have been a marble lady gazing at her marble fountain.

Eddie said, "You look like something I seen once — in a park — a statue."

This, too, seemed oddly to please Miss Avery. She rose and bade him follow her. At the porch she told him to wait, and she went inside. Through the high and narrow lighted windows he could see her moving about among the shelves of books. They jutted out from the walls like the shelves in the department store, only those were cluttered with trumpery glass and china, and these bore only many volumes. At last she found what she had been searching for, and came out to him.

"Know why I like to call you 'Pan'?" she questioned. "Listen, now, while I read."

Eddie leant against a pillar. The porch light, resembling an old lanthorn, threw into relief her harsh face and the slender and youthful elegance of her figure. She read in her queer, harsh voice:

" 'In the old mythologies Pan was represented in uncouth and grotesque fashion with goats' legs, a shaggy covering of hair, a goat's beard and curving horns. But the moderns are wiser, or less superstitious, who have glimpsed him about the country side, haunting old woods, and gardens, whistling upon the reeds about old fountains, and disporting himself among his kind — young trees, plants and streams — a foster child of Nature.' "

"Well," questioned Miss Avery; "catch the likeness?"

"We're out of door chaps," granted Eddie. And he added with his dreadful literalness, "And we're young!"

Miss Avery flushed — not becomingly — a swart red; and presently said "Good-night!"

But next day she asked him to come to the room with the books any evening. "Read, Pan; read — read! Complete your education. Every book's a branch. Make your own choice — there's a wide selection — Romance, History, Poetry. We're not likely to bother each other."

Eddie obeyed promptly. He had never cared much for books. Still it was growing cool now — one must soon spend the evenings indoors. He dressed with his usual care when he had finished his work for the day, and went to the library as she had bade him. He looked along the titles — abstract, uncommunicative things — like strangers whose names have been mumbled in the introduction. In a lower compartment were some old magazines. He drew one out at random.

Immediately his face lighted; its puzzled vagueness of expression lifted. He sat down, spread open his magazine, leant his head on his hand, and followed the text steadily, only pausing at times to turn a page. Finally he looked up, just as Miss Avery entered. He rose.

"You needn't go, Pan."

"I'm through," said Eddie.

"Did you find something you liked?" asked Miss Avery, eyeing the magazine which bore an old date.

He opened to the place, and showed her the heading: "Bee Culture," read Miss Avery, helplessly.

"We got some stands back home," said Eddie. "I see where we could do better."

He continued to read in the evenings, even sampling certain of the books she placed out for him. But they were rarely to his taste. The realistic ones left him unmoved; literal himself, he perceived them literal truth; but he had no imagination, and they photographed blank. The romantic ones he promptly labelled "lies" and had thereupon no further interest in them. Poetry puzzled him; he had to have it diagrammed.

But he continued to browse among the years-old magazines that had lain there gathering dust from the city brother's time; and across the table from him as the days grew on to winter, Miss Avery sat and read — perhaps him — perhaps the pages that lay so carelessly open and were so seldom turned.

One Sunday, after the solemn, stodgy dinner, the brother's wife and the elderly cousins had gone away in scared dismissal, and there had been a great scene between Miss Avery and her brother in the library which had known of late only silent evenings and mute companionship.

"Who's being made a fool of this time?" stormed Miss Avery's brother; "and over a pretty face, too! Because your affianced, through no fault of your own, I grant you, was cozened by a pretty minx, and got his just deserts — she's yellow as a dried pea-

shuck — a wizened pod — shall you forget yourself — and for this pretty boy? I'm told you pass whole evenings with him!"

"Who has told you all these things, my dear brother?" asked Miss Avery, in her mocking voice, the natural harshness of which was masked beneath an ironic gentleness. "My two jailers who serve me!"

"No matter!" blustered the brother. "Be thankful there are those who would protect you — against yourself!"

"And protect you, my good brother — and your rightful share!" said the lady in a curiously gentle voice that had power to inflame the more.

"Where is the beggar?" shouted the brother. "He may listen to reason!"

"Careful, careful," warned Miss Avery. "Don't be too precipitate, brother; you might regret it." She repeated even more gently, "You might regret it. Better go quietly away — first."

She continued to look fixedly at him. He was conscious that he had borne himself ill. On that stage of the old library, with its monotonous setting of shelves and plaster casts, among those mute and staring volumes in some of which doubtless, her starved, cheated and unhappy life had its prototype, it was as if she had played some good part to its triumphant end. He went out without a word, and down the curving drive-way — a big, beefy figure, looking somehow curiously dwarfed through the vista of the garden.

After some weeks the solemn family dinners were

revived. First, the elderly cousins stole back, desiring to be fed from the crumbs of her rich table, and afterwards the scared sister-in-law and the sulky brother. A sort of peace was patched up. And as the winter wore on, the quiet evenings in the library became a custom.

Eddie had acquired a pocket note-book, into which he transcribed in a round, careful hand, much of the subject matter of his nightly readings. Thus under "Hot Beds" were voluminous pages of notes; but his criticism was short and to the point in the case of a volume which he had been induced to peruse at Miss Avery's instance: "Don't think much of it."

One morning Eddie was repotting ferns. He had carefully dumped the plant with its earthy roots upon an old newspaper. It was early spring and a fragrant mist steamed up from the moist ground. He lifted the fern with its cloddy roots and a name sprang up at him from the paper — Ladd.

Eddie read: "Maud Ladd, aged twenty years —" the letters ran together; there followed only a blur. Finally words assembled: "The funeral will be held at four o'clock tomorrow from the home of her parents." The date on the paper was nearly two weeks old.

Eddie finished repotting the ferns, and then, having dressed in his usual careful fashion, presented himself to Miss Avery and requested the day off.

"I must go," said Eddie. "It's the Ladds;" and he added, "I've waited too long."

"Do your Ladds like flowers?" asked Miss Avery, carelessly. "Pick a bouquet for them, Eddie."

"No," decided Eddie, after a moment. "Maud liked florists' roses — red roses with long stems in a green box."

He stopped down town and bought red roses for Maud. With the narrow green box under his arm, he went up the sagging porch. Mrs. Ladd came to the door. When she saw Eddie, natural feeling overcame her. She employed her apron copiously for a season, but was soon in the full flow of her recital from which she seemed to derive a mournful comfort.

"She wasn't sick only 'bout a week," said Mrs. Ladd. "Fever — and then it took a pneumonia turn. If we'd a known where to send for you — Maud says, 'Tell Eddie I waited'."

She went away, and came back with a crimson knitted strip. "It's for you — a neck-tie. Don't you remember Maud a-knitting it? She had it laid away in the drawer with your other things. Wait a minute, Eddie, and I'll get your things."

She gave him the bundle, but still held jealously to the strip of knitted silk. "It was the last work Maud done."

"You keep it, Mrs. Ladd," begged Eddie; "then it'll be both of ours." He could not have brought himself to wear it. Mrs. Ladd accepted the proviso gratefully.

She laid off the apron that covered her black dress, and went with him. Eddie laid his red roses, like splendid reversed torches, upon Maud's grave.

That night Eddie read rather later than usual in the library, making sprawling annotations in his

pocket note-book. Finally, he slapped it shut and rose.

"I thought I would tell you," said Eddie, "that I won't be working after this month — not here."

"Not here!" exclaimed Miss Avery. "Don't your place suit?"

"It ain't the place," said Eddie, patiently; "but I got to get a place of my own. You see, part of the home place is mine."

"It will wait," suggested Miss Avery, in her mocking, harsh voice.

"Sometimes folks wait too long," said Eddie.

"You needn't wait any longer," said Miss Avery, harshly. "You may go at any time."

"I'll wait till my month's up," said Eddie, stolidly.

"O, I'll pay you — for the unexpired portion," flung Miss Avery, lightly.

"I'd ruther work for it," said Eddie.

But thereafter he came no more to the library. Perhaps that last night, when he had overstayed a trifle, he had completed his reading. But Miss Avery continued each evening to sit there reading — who knows — perhaps the future — for her, dull reading enough.

One evening of spring, scarce a year from his jubilant departure, Eddie Pease arrived home. The first person he met was old Johnny Meek, limping along, pushing his pop-corn wagon ahead.

"Hello, Eddie!" cried old Johnny. "Find what you went for?"

"Found I'd left it here," said Eddie.

He continued down the street. Willy Gentry was running a lawn-mower about his little front yard,

"If here ain't Eddie!" shouted Willy Gentry. "You can't guess what I got, Eddie! Come on in and see!"

A young woman appeared at the door. She was pale with the pallor of young motherhood, and her round brown eyes, with their sharply curved lashes, were bent upon a bundle in her arms. It might have been a bale of fine cloth, lace and embroideries, but Eddie knew better; he knew it was Willy and Ida Gentry's baby.

His folks were at supper. At first glance it seemed to him that his sister, Emma, was wonderfully younger and prettier than before he went away. She sprang up to put a plate for him. His mother's eyes, behind their curious film, had a misty light; the brothers greeted each other casually, as if they had met daily. The new man, Eddie perceived, was quite like one of the family.

After supper, Eddie removed his collar and splashed his face and hands at the kitchen sink, leaving great rivulets of drops meandering down the clean oil-cloth. Then he went upstairs to his old room.

"What's he doing?" called his mother to his sister, Emma, from the darkened front room.

"Dressin', I guess; he's took off his collar," answered his sister, Emma. "Shall I light the lamp?"

"Not yet. When'll he be down, I wonder?"

"I guess that's him now."

"Better light it then."

Eddie came in blinking. He was carefully brushed and polished. It did not occur to him to sit awhile with his mother and sister — why should he? he had come home to stay.

"Guess I'll go over to Kirks'," he muttered.

"Do," said his mother. "Marcy Kirk's a good girl." And she added, meaningly, "She got no need to keep a-waitin'."

Eddie went out through the garden. In the moonlight the cabbages looked like great silver roses. He saw his sister, Emma, and Dave, the hired hand, bending over the frame of tomato plants.

Marcia came to the door. She was carrying a hand-lamp, and at sight of him, she gave a little cry and set the lamp down upon a table behind her. In the black screen she looked, as Eddie had seen her once before, like a picture in a narrow frame.

She came out into the vine-curtained porch. This time a hundred clicking heels would not have deterred Eddie. And when he had kissed her, he simply and methodically told her what he meant by it.

"We won't wait," said Eddie; "we been waitin' long enough. Sometimes folks waits too long."

"We'll have a June weddin'," agreed Marcia — "with roses!"

"Not red roses!" cried Eddie, sharply.

"Who ever heard of red roses," scorned Marcia, gently, "for a weddin'? We'll have a pink and white weddin'."

The beloved woman beside him, Eddie yet felt a sudden, fierce protectiveness for the dead girl. He thought: "Let Maud keep her red roses!"

The Midland

A MAGAZINE OF
THE MIDDLE WEST

NOVEMBER-DECEMBER, 1919

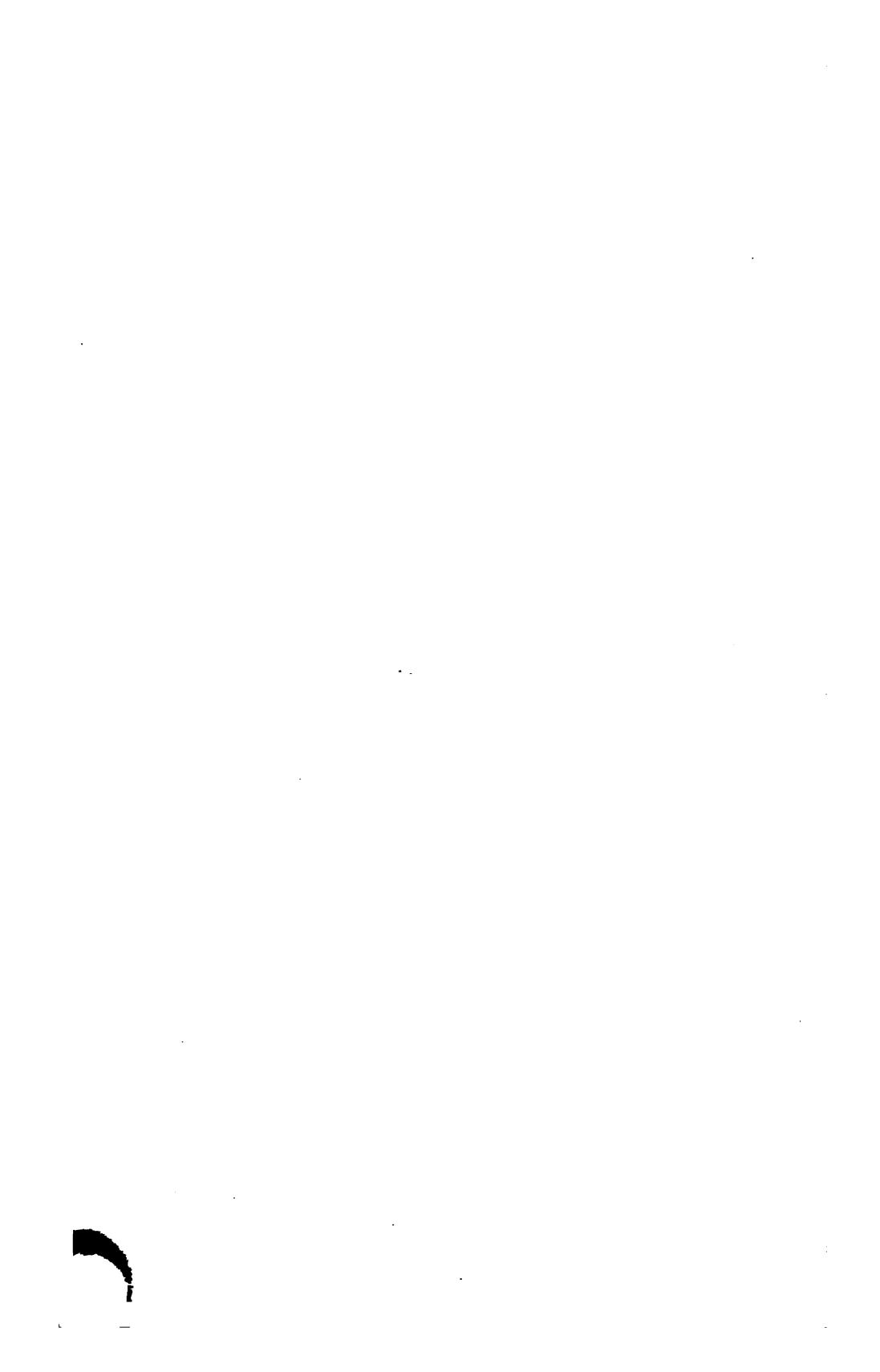
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The Midland

A MAGAZINE OF THE MIDDLE WEST

VOL. V NOVEMBER—DECEMBER 1919 NOS. 11-12

Four Poems

By BERNARD RAYMUND

IF I GO DOWN

If I go down then I go down in flame,
And hill will look across the gulf to hill,
Waters run red above their sunken stones,
Birds wake and flutter blindly thru the glare.
So, for a little space may clamor fill
My valley to the rim with thunder tones,
Smoke and the crash of embers everywhere.
So, for a space—Then trees will dance the same
Slow sweeping rhythm in the morning light.
If I go down then I go down in flame,
And they shall tread the ashes out of sight.

WHITE MAGIC

To hold the charm, and yet not care to use it,
Was ever irony more fit?
The bread of life set forth and yet refuse it
No matter if you starve for it?
—Sometimes the tune will out without my knowing
And I look up to find her near,
Always as if by chance, her strange eyes glowing,
Is it with love, perhaps, or fear?
And then today I found that I could call her
With just the first half-whispered strain;
Oh what mischance might not befall her
If I should call again?

CAPRICE

Sunset blasted out of a granite sky,
The meadow wet with the rain of an afternoon —
I cannot catch you, no! and I shall not try,
For I know you'll be back to sit at my side as soon
As you find I am cold to your sport and your raillery.
Wings you should have, not clumsy earth-clodden
feet,
Wings never need fear the clutch of a dewberry vine!
Then you will slip from my grasp be I ever so fleet,
With wings you may laugh and the turn will never
be mine.

There you will float, great soft eyed moth that you
are,
With measured sweep straight out toward the west's
molten rift,
While in vain I call, with arms outstretched from
afar,
. As I stumble on thru the weeds and the boulder drift.

DECEMBER WOODS

Winter boughs that hang like smoke against a win-
ter sky —

Gray dim multitudes of stalwart patriarchs
Roof over, haven in the drifted hosts that lie
Curled at their ancient feet in dead forgotten
ranks.

Windless sanctuary here and spaces vast as dreams.
Laughter and sibilant songs of love enchant no
more.

Grief there is none, nor stabbing joy. The utter si-
lence seems
Born of the night that kneels to gather up her own.

'Toinette Sketches

By HARRIET JOOB

I

THE PASSING OF THE LITTLEST TWIN

"Toinette's bare sunburned toes stirred up the hot dust in choking whorls as she ran along the prairie trail, dragging impatiently at her mother's hand. She was so afraid they would be too late!

Ever since word had come that the littlest of the Johanssen twins had died in the night, fear that they would be too late,—that Christ would come quickly to the baby, as he had come to the Ruler's little girl, and make it alive again before she and her mother could reach the cabin,—had been "Toinette's consuming anxiety. She had never looked on death and was aquiver with eagerness to see what it was like, and today her mother could not leave her behind, for both Sam and little Gene were away at Uncle Jule's.

While her mother had moved softly and silently from trunk to workbasket, gathering bits of lace and muslin into a tiny bundle, the little girl had fidgetted with impatience to be off; and when they were at last upon the road, she hurried breathlessly on, dragging at her mother's hand to quicken her slower pace.

When they reached the bare, weather-beaten

shack, the child pressed eagerly in, close behind her mother, through the group of whispering women, on — on — into the dark, cluttered room.

Then, suddenly, something caught in her throat. Was that what people meant by death? That tiny shape in the draggled pink calico slip lying in the corner of the trundle-bed? Why, the baby's clenched fists were cold! And the little pinched face — Oh, why did not some one hurry and ask Christ to make it well again right away, as He had made the little girl of whom her father had read at prayers? How could they stand stupidly talking while the baby lay there with its face all cold and puckered with pain?

There was soft-eyed Mrs. Dunnegan, with her snuff stick between her teeth, shaking her head as she whispered to big Ma Maloney; and old Aunt Mira White mumbling something through a mouthful of pins, while Mrs. Kent measured off cambric on the cluttered bureau. On the edge of the tumbled big bed the baby's mother sat hunched up, staring before her with dull, unseeing eyes; and 'Toinette's own mother, in the one-armed rocker, close beside the stricken woman, was hushing the fretful little living twin to sleep. Not one of them all had thought to ask Christ to hurry to make the baby alive again!

"Yo' better run 'long into the kitchen, sissy; the childern's there," drawled kind Ma Maloney, catching sight of the child's white face; and 'Toinette, crushing back the tears, wandered on into the dark

lean-to, where a huge pot of coffee bubbled over the smouldering fire in the rusty stove.

But she shrank from the group of whispering, big-eyed children, and stole past them, out of the door, into the sunshine.

From the corn-crib came the sound of hammer and saw and of men's muffled voices; but over the level prairie stretches and in the great blue arch of the sky was ineffable silence and peace; and out of the brooding silence was born a resolve that made the child's heart beat fast.

"Christ," she whispered, unsteadily, lifting her face to the sunlit heavens, "the big people have forgotten to ask you to make the baby alive again, and so I must do it. Please come and make it 'live again, right away!'"

Then, breathless, star-eyed, with the ache all gone from throat and breast, she waited in the stillness, —waited, waited.

The Healer, she knew, was now on the way, and soon would enter the dark little hut. When she should again cross the threshold, the baby would gurgle at her as happy babies do, and twine its fingers around hers, and the faces of the women would be laughing and glad. When they saw the baby waken at a word and touch, they would wonder why they had forgotten this simple thing!

When she could wait no longer, 'Toinette stole around to the window and climbed on a soap box to peep in. But no strange bright presence met her expectant eyes. The baby's mother still leaned list-

lessly against the foot-board, her fingers fumbling aimlessly with the dingy patchwork quilt; Ma Maloney's husky whispers rumbled on as she hemmed a tiny pillow case; and 'Toinette's mother sat quietly whipping lace in the neck of a wee white slip. And the baby yet lay there rigid and still.

Perhaps she had not waited long enough, the little girl whispered to herself with a sobbing breath; or perhaps—He had not heard!

"Christ," she faltered again, clinging with tense fingers to the rough gray clapboards, "please come soon, soon, *soon*, and make the baby alive!"

Then again she waited for His coming, moment after moment; watching with anguished eyes the dusty trail that wound in long white loops across the brown prairie.

Moment after moment she fought against despair: — fought to keep hope alive in her aching breast;— then suddenly the tense fingers lost their grip of the gray clapboards and the little figure sank sobbing to the earth.

Christ did not hear, and there was no one—anywhere — to make the dead baby alive again!

II

THE SHIP ISLAND BOX

It was the time of ripe tomatoes, and 'Toinette and her brothers sat in a row with the Sherrod children on the Sherrod's gallery floor, swinging

their bare feet over the edge and munching tomatoes.

Usually a state of feud existed between the doctor's brood and the Sherrod clan; but a new brother had just come to the Sherrods and in the joy and excitement a temporary truce had been patched up between the factions.

"Le's go make a raft on the pond," proposed Levi to Sam, magnanimous in the consciousness of an envied new possession.

"No, le's ride the yearlin'!" urged Levi's brother, Tige, not to be outdone in hospitality.

"Can you really ride him 'ithout bein' thrown?" asked skeptical little Sam, looking undauntedly up at the older boys.

"Well, I ain't never *yet*," owned lank Tige; "but I'm a *goin'* to. Come on an' le's see! You, too, 'Toinette,'" he added generously with masculine condescension, to the lone little lady.

But 'Toinette, shaking her head, watched the boys as they trooped away, and then crept to the door to steal another glimpse through the crack.

There her mother sat beside Mrs. Sherrod's bed, brushing the flies away with a ragged palmleaf fan. If only she might slip in for another look at the wee creature, wrapped in the faded plaid shawl there on her mother's knee!

"I wisht we had one!" she whispered covetously to fat little Buddy Sherrod, whom the elder lads had sent ignominiously back to the gallery perch.

"Why, you all could get one real easy," Buddy whispered back, "for your papa keeps 'em in that

long box in his office, an' brings 'em 'roun' to folks in his saddle bags. He brought us this un'!"

The little girl's eyes grew big and her heart beat fast. The "long box" had always been known to the doctor's children as the "Ship Island Box", for in the dim and distant ages, before even he and mother were married, and while he was yet a government surgeon at Ship Island, father had had this chest made to hold his books and clothes. To Toinette it had always breathed of mystery, for its very name brought pictures to one's mind of ships and big water, and the strange world beyond the blue-black belt of woods on the western horizon; and the fact that she and her brothers had been forbidden ever to open this chest, had only increased its mystery in their eyes.

"Are you sure, Buddy?" Toinette whispered, while her face grew white and sharp with sudden temptation.

"Why, he brought us this un'!" Buddy offered as unassailable proof.

"Then—I—am—going—to—see!" It was the first time in her short five years that the little girl had ever consciously disobeyed; but now a passion of excitement that set her body all a-quiver urged her eager feet along the hollowed-out path and across the dry dugout. Her heart beat so heavily with the sense of guilt that she could scarcely breathe; but there was no flinching from her purpose. She *must* see for herself if what Buddy thought was true.

Yet when her cold hands had fumbled with the fastening, and tugged up the heavy lid, her heart seemed suddenly to stand still, and she was too blind for a moment to see what lay within.

She was conscious at first only of blank disappointment, for no babies with wrinkled faces and tight-clasped mottled fists lay within the chest. In one end were her father's surgical instruments in their shabby leather bag, and beside them his microscope. Then, suddenly, with a gasp of wonder, she became aware that Buddy must have been right after all; for in the other end of the chest were carefully folded piles of baby clothes. . . . Her father must have forgotten to put these in his saddle-bags when he took the last of the babies to the Sherrods.

But why, oh why, had he not kept the very last one he had, for them here at home!

She shrank from the thought of returning to the noisy brood across the dugout, and wandered wistfully out to play in her sand pile at the end of the kitchen. But the house seemed so strangely still with Sam and 'Gene and her mother all away that soon she trailed down to her playhouse in the roots of the lone tree at the bend of the ravine, where she so often played alone.

There she busied herself by setting it carefully to rights; re-laying the sticks that marked off the bedroom from the kitchen, and sorting out upon a shelving root her little store of broken crockery and leaky kettles.

Then, from a knothole in the tree, she carefully

drew her treasures, and, like a little bower-bird, ranged them on the smooth earthen floor: a delicately mottled guinea feather, two pretty pebbles, a fragment of broken china in soft blue tones, a bit of red glass, and a pine cone brought from far away.

But a heaviness that she had never known before weighed upon her, till she was driven to tuck her treasures back into the tree and trudge reluctantly across the dugout to the Sherrods.

When, at sunset, another neighbor came in to watch with the sick woman, and Mother Ruth, gathering her small brood about her, turned homeward, 'Toinette, silent and heavy-eyed, pressed close to her, holding tightly by the fold of her skirt. But the little girl's burdened conscience could not yet force the shy lips to utterance.

The night had fallen, and the supper things been cleared away, and the children tucked safely in bed, when the weary mother, sitting mending by the light of the paper-shaded lamp, was startled by the touch of a little cold hand and sobbing whisper.

"I—I looked into the Ship Island box today!"

"Why, 'Toinette! How could you be so naughty? When mama has told you never to touch that box!"

"Y-e-s; I know. But Buddy told me papa kept babies in that box to give to folks; and I—I hoped—there'd be a baby there. But there was only baby clothes! You'll have to send 'em over after the baby, I guess, 's papa forgot to take 'em 'ith the baby."

"But, 'Toinette," the bewildered mother looked

into the clear child-eyes in troubled perplexity; "papa doesn't keep babies in that box, nor take them to people. It is God who sends babies into people's homes."

"God! Does *He* bother about *babies*?" Toinette asked in amaze, her eyes big with wonder. Then, slowly, "But—how—did the little clothes come into the box? Did God send them, too?"

Again the mother's troubled eyes studied the earnest face. How far could a little child's discretion be trusted? Then, "God tells mothers and fathers before He sends the baby," she explained, slowly; "and then the mother makes the little clothes all ready for it."

Toinette listened breathlessly, and pondered for a moment in silence; then, pressing closer to her mother's knee, while a new radiance and wonder dawned in the small white face, she groped her way slowly to the dazzling truth.

"But — those clothes — were in our house! Is — a baby — coming here?"

Ruth gathered her woman-child close with a sudden tremulous, hungry sense of comradeship. "Yes, little daughter," she whispered; "but you must tell no one. It must be a secret between you and mama and Papa Doctor."

"And God," murmured happy Toinette.

The Freshman

By EDNA TUCKER MUTH

He stands behind the barricade of books,
A bit of raw life, in a deadened room;
Great hands, red wrists, wide eyes and trembling
lips,
Waiting his doom.

“You failed in English.” The great shoulders droop,
One hand pulls gently at his shabby coat,
The other rising stiffly tries to hide
His trembling throat.

Above the hardwood, where the white birch bends,
The pine croons and the loon calls, and the deer
Leaps through the furrows that his father turns
To send him here.

He sees his father setting down the pails
To greet a neighbor, who has been to town,
“Here, Thoralf, comes a letter from the boy”—
The puzzled frown.

He sees his mother, with her faded eyes,
Her knotted hands, her smooth pale hair,
His round-cheeked sisters, and the neighbor girl;
They read and stare.

Then for a moment there will be quick words,
His father's heavy oath, his sister's cries,
His mother's quiet voice, saying in Norsk,
That Ole tries.

He shoulders failure with a steadyng lip,
He turns his back upon the Learned One;
Head up, chest out, goes down the corridor,
His march begun.

To V. C. G.

By WALTER McCLELLAN

This gray old house of books and faded chairs,
Where often you have come, content to see
But those you loved — oh, it can never be
Again as when you came! The hour declares
That nought has changed: soft dusk, a fire that flares
In the bleak grate, and out of doors the low
Long calling of the wind. And yet we know
Your talk's all done! All else the same, but there's
No bringing back your words. They are a part
Of Life's night blast which blows within the still
Deep places of our souls, and they are heard
Not even as dead leaves. How we should start
If this, the loneliest of God's winds, might fill
With wandering sound! From you would come
what Word?

Melody Jim

By REYNOLDS KNIGHT

The wry lips of old Doctor Kilgrew twisted in their tortuous smile. Because of the scar on his cheek it was a necessary forerunner of speech from him.

"Your pa's dying, Kizzy Marie," he said, baldly. "He's going fast now." The doctor's lean yellow fingers touched the wrist flung out toward him on the bed. "He's breathing his last."

The light out of doors was failing. The sun was gone and the twilight was deepening. Through the window came the heavy perfume from the locust trees, and towards the river a black-haw, drifted white with blossoms, stood out sheer and cool against the background of wood darkling in the twilight. A small mob of men and boys passed along the road before the house on their way to the town well, there to idle through the evening as was the village custom. Their voices were large in the twilight. As they passed one voice suddenly pitched itself above the others.

"Wonder if old Melody Jim's kicked the bucket yet?" Then some one laughed. They passed on.

Kizzie Marie sniffled. Her huge bulk of flesh sat at the doctor's elbow. With the back of her hand she brushed at her eyes.

"Don't let him die, Doc," she began. "Save him for me. He's my pa. Oh save him, Doc; save him, save him. He's all I got in this world." She began to snuffle hysterically, fat sobs shaking her shapeless form. The noise irritated the doctor. His wry lips moved to a snarling smile.

"Shut up!" he commanded. "You're an old fool."

"But, Doc, I ought to cry—"

"Shut up. Let the man die in peace. A pack o' sniveling relatives gives me a pain"

Melody Jim was relieved at the quiet that followed. Kizzie Marie was an old fool, even though she was his daughter. He lay easily upon his pillow. The gentle breeze through the window fell away, and the perfume of the locust trees was shut off. There came to his nostrils the familiar odor of the room; the musty smell of the carpet, the curtains and the wall paper, and the stiff, hard horse-hair sofa against the wall. He had lived with them all his life. There was an odor missing. His nose searched for it in the conglomeration that filled the room. Kilgrew's medicines tricked him from it for a moment before he found it. He had it — he had it now, firmly. It gave him a pleasurable sensation to possess it. It was the odor of the melodeon in the corner. The dark red plush about the keyboard, the fine glossy rosewood case, the milk white ivory keys, the ancient leather bellows gave off a sweet pale fragrance that titillated his soul. It gave him pleasure, though Kizzy Marie was a fool — was a fool,

was a fool, was a fool! Why did his mind strain and whip as a flag in the wind, snapping interminably over the words? Night was creeping about the briar patch on the bluff overlooking the river. He could feel it was so—and he had never painted the house; it still squatted small and brown and dingy upon the ground, its bush of yellow roses covering the south window.

"His feet are growing cold," said old Doctor Kilgrew.

It was odd. He realized now that Doc had touched his feet. He had felt somebody's hand on somebody's feet. Of course it was his own feet, but how droll that he must think it out this way. Kizzie Marie had been so funny when she was a child. He had played "This Little Pig Goes to Market" on her small pink toes as she sat in his lap. And she had been wont to creep beneath the melodeon and jump out at him when he came in from the brier patch. Anna had loved the melodeon. "I James Bassett, do take this woman—" No, that wasn't it. Anna had said, "I, Anna, do take this man—" And then the infare, the infare, the infare, the infare! Anna had been so pretty. Father had given her the melodeon. "Nita, Juanita, ask thy soul if we should part. . . ." She could sing prettily. Her throat was soft like a bird's.

Then they moved to Kansas and settled at Santana on the banks of the Neosho River. They were going to be rich and have a fortune. They were going to grow up with the country. "The railroad

has got to come this way, Anna," he had said to her. "The land has got to improve in value. We can't fail. That is unthinkable. Santana will be a big town some day in this part of the country, and we shall grow along with it."

But the railroad had gone elsewhere, isolating Santana with its dozen or so houses clustered on the river bluff, and his land had been thin land. In the hot summers his crops burned out with the sun even before those of his neighbors, and the chinch bugs and the Hessian fly got into his wheat fields: his orchards withered and his live stock died of plagues. So, instead of growing rich, he became poor. He needed money and he mortgaged his farm, and then he was bound to his own land as firmly as if he had been a slave. It was the constant drudgery that broke Anna's health, and eventually he and Kizzie Marie were left alone.

"He's about gone." Something—somebody made the sound near him. It was difficult to comprehend, for it was a large, quiet sound and not in any particular place. He's about gone, about gone, about gone. His mind whipped at the thought curiously. The sounds had a vague familiarity; it was as though he were tired and could not quite find out what they meant, could not reach far enough to understand. About gone, about gone, about gone, about— The sounds echoed largely, as though in a cellar. Oh well, why bother? He had always failed before. His whole life had been a failure. He was Melody Jim, the failure. His life had never been

what he had wanted it to be; he had been a solitary Moses, wandering in the wilderness. Beyond was his Canaan, beautiful, cool, alluring, promising him happiness untold; but all his life had been spent in bitter vales full of promises unredeemed, of blasted hopes, even down to the moment when he had come to die.

A burning sense of regret, of helplessness sank down through him like a crimson stain, coloring his soul in confusion. Why could he never achieve his ambition? Poverty, poverty, poverty; the millstone of the mortgage that, try as he might, he never could lift from his neck. And his fingers! They would fumble so and stumble and hesitate over the notes of the melodeon he never could find; and all the while the grand passion moved on in his soul, dumb and unexpressed. He had been late in finding himself; his span of years was half spent when he discovered that the secret, the great tender heart of all life was in his keeping. He had burned to express it, to make other men hear the music that drove across his soul at times like the fierce storms that raced across his farm, and again at times moved on as calm and placidly as the river beneath his brier patch on the bluff, again that passed and filled him with ineffable peace, as did his summer nights.

Oh the wheels! They raced, they roared, they clashed, steel on steel, pounding over the switchies, smashing, screaming, grinding on the curves; like fiends from hell they shrieked faster, faster, faster, faster,—God, would they never stop! No peace, no

quiet, no calm! On through the night until the universe spun dizzily from the shock, and Anna had become alarmed and crouched in his arms with fear. Out of the terror of that night had been born the thing that changed the whole fabric of his being.

"Do you feel it, Anna?" he had asked her. "It's like the music in the church at Minnie's wedding last night. If I could play I could make you understand. It moves, moves like a mighty river, dim and holy in a silver dawn—and it shrieks and cries like the wheels. Hear them!" He had held her close in his arms all the night as they journeyed home from the wedding of his sister's child.

Once more back on the farm at home he had been in a fever to learn to play the melodeon. Anna had agreed to teach him what she knew, and they began, for all the while the harmonies he could hear grew greater and more beautiful. He would express himself when he learned to play; he would put his gorgeous Kansas sunsets into music; he would bring the vast quiet of his prairie nights to do his bidding for other men's joy. The fields, the green trees, the locust blossoms, his flock of sheep in the brier patch, the river, the soft deep nights—all these clamored in his soul for utterance; they must remain dumb forever if he did not give them voice in music. Anna realized, she knew, she sympathized with his desire, and helped him until she died.

That had been the great tragedy when she died; he had only begun to learn, his fingers faltered and stumbled and found only discord when he yearned

to create his harmonies. "Pa, for heaven's sake! You drive me distracted with that everlastin' noise of yourn!" For heaven's sake! heaven's sake! heaven's sake! Kizzie Marie, the fool, had never understood — never, never, never!

He would stand of an evening in his brier patch upon the river bluff and listen to the throbbing heart of the night, the river below silent, unhurried, moving serenely on; the stars overhead swinging in the blackness; the night wind in the briars; the mocking bird in the black-haw tree, quiet now that it had hymned the evening; the murmur; the warm smell of his sheep scattered like gray stones about the patch — these sounds, these sights, these beauties crushed him almost with their poignant appeal to be expressed in music. He would rush away trembling to his melodeon, his soul filled with melodies that cried for being. Oh, God, God, God, let him find the notes on his melodeon! With eyes alight, breath tight in his throat, he would rush into the room where the little melodeon stood in its rosewood case. Was it this note or that? Try this, this! It was, it was, it was a beginning! Now the next! Like the warm bosom of his mother in other days, the awful sweetness, the majesty of his melodies would settle upon him, pleading, urging, hungering for life — then his untrained fingers would fail him and stumble upon clashing discords. "Pa, for heaven's sake! You worry me to death with that noise of yourn! Can't you let that old melodeon alone?" Let it alone, alone, alone, alone, alone! His mind

whipped at the words. Why couldn't he have let it alone?

"Jim's learning to play a toon," said Alf Terrel at the village well one night. "What be it, Jim?" and Alf winked at the crowd, for he was a wag and had the gift of cap and bells in Santana. "Is it 'Money Musk', now? or perhaps 'Skip to My Lou?' I tell you, men, there's nothing like 'Green Corn' or 'Turkey in the Straw' for a lively toon. They'll set a man's feet to jiggin' ever' time. Speak up, Jim." He had tried to tell them of the melodies that dwelt within his breast, those soothing, yearning voices that would speak their beauties through him. But only witless faces stared into his own until Alf set the crowd roaring with a sally. He cocked his head askew and spat in the dust. "Well, well," he drawled, "if our own Melody Jim ain't learning to play the toon the old cow died on." Alf's laugh was loudest, drawing those of the others into a gale of merriment with him. "Melody Jim," "Melody Jim," ran the voices in comment when the laughing died away, elbows nudging ribs furtively.

"That's a doggone good one, Alf," said some one. "That's a right peart nick name." And Melody Jim he had been all the rest of his life.

From that time he was sensible that people began to make light of him. He had been a steady, hard working, shrewd speaking resident of Santana, but little by little he felt that opinion grew to look upon him as one cracked. His associates whom he had known for years began to be overserious with him

in conversation, and were full of eager assurances about his melodies. The children of the village were wont to turn out when they met him along the road, then stand staring after with childish curiosity. He was no longer Jim Bassett, but simple-minded Melody Jim, who was forever wandering about in the fields and woods, pausing to listen, to stand rapt in a trance of harmonies no one else could hear, who was continually making distressing, wailing discords on his melodeon. They looked upon him as a failure in life, no one took him seriously; he made a bare subsistence with his few sheep in his brier patch, helped out by Kizzie Marie with her chickens and eggs. His great dreams, dreams of riches, were vanished; dreams of becoming a musician, of giving to the world the great music that filled his soul, had come to naught. And now he, Melody Jim, the failure, was about to die.

The feeling of helplessness, of bitter regret, sank deeper into his soul. He was a failure. People would remember him only as Melody Jim, the failure. He wanted to die; he was willing for death to blot out all the bitter memory of his wasted life. How futile had been that life of his! Never for a moment had his actual life coincided with his inner ideal. He was always going to become something different from what he was, something better. He was capable of living a greater, richer life in the world, but his environment had been more than he could overcome. Always expecting confidently to attain his ideal, his hope had never waned; never

had he dreamed that death would come at last and find him still plain Melody Jim. To the end of time, till eternity should be wound up and the kingdom of nothing come to rule, he would be just Melody Jim, the man who never became what he had hoped to be — this was the end of things, the bitter cup to reward him when life was done.

He knew what the crowd of loafers at the well would say when his funeral passed that way — that dull, ignorant crowd of fools that had never known a passion greater than the mere lusting of the flesh, who lived and died as animals do. He could see Alf Terrel cock his head and spit in the dust, see him tap his forehead and hear him say, "There goes Melody Jim, feet first, boys. Another son-of-a-gun gone to hell." Their loud laughter smote upon his soul. He shuddered.

Somebody was speaking — somebody, somebody. They had been speaking for hours, for years, from a great distance. He could hear them; their words pounded hollowly upon his ears — not his ears, no, no, not his ears — they were words spoken in another world, but not for his ears, yet he heard them.

"A man's got to have something for his work," said a mountainous voice.

"But, Doc, I ain't got a cent o' money to my name. I'll give my oath." The voice was a screaming thing with a dirty face.

"Oh well, maybe not. But I've got to have something, Kizzie Marie. I'm out my time and medicines. I don't work for nothing." The terrible weight of



the voice buried him under a million pounds, a million pounds, a million pounds — and it was as far away as China. "There's the melodeon. I might take that. My daughter in the city might want it for a curio."

"Thank the Lord, Doc! Will you take that and call it square? He's drove me distracted with that all my life. Thank the Lord!" Thank the Lord, thank the Lord, the Lord, the Lord, the Lord! The words boomed like a cannon. Thank the Lord, thank— The room was growing smaller. The melodeon was closer to him; it moved up beside his bed. He could see the milk white ivory keys with their rounded ends which gave a graceful scalloped edge to the keyboard. He could feel the satiny finish of the rosewood case beneath his fingers — no, not his fingers, but Melody Jim's fingers. It was curious how Melody Jim could feel its smoothness while he could not although he knew all about it. The room was growing smaller, smaller, smaller. He could feel the walls shutting in upon him. The extension hat rack on the wall with its pegs seemed to invite him to hang up his sorrow and regret until some other day.

The breeze blew in at the window. His roses! His yellow roses! Yellow, yellow, yellow, like his October sunsets. He could smell the rich yellow color — and beyond, the heavier, deeper perfume from the locust trees. If he could have played that on his melodeon! Softly, gently make the roses, his yellow roses, nod and sway, nod and sway, and smile

— just that, delicately and oh, so gently — and then, and then, and then, and then — How his mind whipped over the words — oh yes, and then — The great rich depth of locust blossoms — gently at first as twilight in June, oh so gently bring the locust blossoms in. Now a little stronger, a little surer — give them firmness. Now like a strong wind blowing down the river like the firm, swift flight of wild geese — greater, greater, louder, louder, sweeter, until — Now, now the heart of life, of creation, pour it forth, make it to sing, to sob, to cry — oh make it that! but make it to live, make men see it, feel it, thrill with it in their souls as he had left it — just that, the heart of creation ; make men know that they were a part of it as perfume was a part of his yellow roses. His yellow roses, yes, yes,— then the great strong music of his locust blossoms would fall away, softly at first, slowly — then faster and faster until it became like distant thunder. Then yellow roses nodding and swaying in the bush —

It was quite dark inside his head. The room was very small now. Years and years and years ago someone had spoken in a voice with a dirty face.

“Look, Doc; he’s dyin’ peaceful. See the smile.” Years and years ago the voice had spoken. It was odd how he had heard it but now. Ears were funny things that way. Fancy their not telling him about it at once. The humor of it amused him. It was pleasant just to grow smaller and smaller and smaller — and smaller and smaller. He was the size of a pea now. The melodeon was with him. He be-

gan to move. All the time he had been very stationary, in fact, much more immovable than that, yes, twice or three times as immovable. Now he was moving slowly, rapidly, faster, faster — wild undreamed-of speed!

The wind swept through the reeds of his melodeon. A tone burst like a trumpet blast of flame, pure like gold, like snow water, like dawn, like the light in a woman's eyes, like the heart of a child. Its rich voice filled the universe. . . . God, how pure, how ineffably pure and sweet! It was his soul, his life, the world; it was everything — an ecstacy of being, time and eternity, being and becoming, the first and last of all things, the high mountains and the depths of the sea, night and day, sleeping and waking; it was the wind in the brier patch and the perfume of the locust blossoms.

How small he was! He was smaller than a mustard seed. He was shrinking with the speed of an express train — yes, faster, like the flight of a meteor, faster, faster, faster. He was smaller now than anything he had ever seen and he whirled and whirled farther and farther in the blackness, eddying wider, farther, faster, in cosmic circles that swept beyond the sun — round, round, round, round — a squirrel in a cage; mice on a turning wheel.

An echo rang dully down to him in the darkness. It was as though the voice of a giant storm had whispered into the ear of a mountain, a dirty-faced voice, "He's dyin' happy"—dyin', dyin', happy, happy — dyin', he's dyin' happy, happy, happy. A

vague familiarity like old forgotten dreams was in the sound. Who was dyin'? Who? He remembered dimly a Jim Bassett. Perhaps those were his ears that had heard —

All the while the melodeon's voice, pure and clear, stronger growing, burned like a flame before his eyes. He could see it in the darkness, see its clear rhythmic tone; he could feel it in his muscles; he could taste it; he could smell it. It was like chimes in frosty air, like chimes across lush grass at evening, like chimes in noonday heat. Its beauty filled him with an ecstasy; it drew him on in mad swift flight, faster, faster, faster than starlight; faster than the leap of lightning. Round and round and round he spun beyond the rim of the universe.

The tone! The tone from his melodeon! What was it? Its terrible beauty struck like a bolt in his heart and he felt his heart give a startled leap. It was — the tone — it was life, the marrow of life, the arcanum, God's holy of holies —. No, no, he could not express it — he could feel it, taste it, live it! It was as close to him as the skin on his face, it was the breath in his lungs, it was the very heart of him! But he could not utter it unless he could utter his tongue! Ah, he had come into the final experience of life, experience quite beyond expression! If he could only play it, put it into music — this single tone that filled him, if he could do that then the people might know. They would know it, of course, when they came to die, for this was death, this unutterable beauty; but if he could tell now, they no

longer would call him Melody Jim, the failure, for he would be as God speaking. He could not die without another trial. If he could sit at his melodeon and play this —. He could do it! For he had heard and seen. He knew the great mystery of life — this unutterable, inexpressible beauty.

How fast he spun beyond the stars! How small he was! How far he had come — weary, weary, weary miles lay between him and his lips, his eyes, his ears, his fingers. He must go back and reveal the thing he felt; reveal it even though it were only to Kizzie Marie, who never had understood. Back! Back! Stop this mad turning-wheel. He set his will. Slowly, slowly, under strength that might have heaved up mountain ranges, that was fit to crack the earth to splinters, he stayed the swift rush. Slower. Slower. Slow. Slow. He stopped!

How quiet!

Then back, back, back — he was returning — back, faster, faster, faster, unwinding the cosmic circles. Round and round, round, round, round. In past the outer rim of the universe like a circling eagle drawing nearer, nearer to his yellow roses swaying in the bush. His lips, his throat seemed closer — he could almost reach them — he — he was back! back in the old body again. How natural the feel of himself once more; so very quiet, so very, very Melody Jim, so very failure-like. And now he must speak, must tell of the things he had felt, must put them on his melodeon so that all might hear. It was only on that that he could express it truly. Ah, here were his lips now. He was immovable once more; the mad

whirling was gone. He lay on his bed. He could hear the doctor breathing. He felt fingers on his pulse. He must tell quickly, quickly — he must — his lips, his fingers must speak —

“Aw, look, Doc; he’s come to!” The words from Kizzie Marie startled him. Their unexpectedness confused him, their proximity —. But let him speak, let him only speak if he could not play — let him —. He tried — he — his lips moved — then, the tone burst again more beautifully than before, and down he went and out and on, swinging wider, farther, faster, to the rim of the universe and beyond in a twinkling. And like base, heavy metal compared to the gold of his tone came a dull voice trailing after him, a voice large and screaming — with a dirty face —

“Did you hear, Doc, what he said? ‘Melody Jim!’ just like that. Thinkin’ always of hisself. That man!” That man, that man, that man! How he ripped and roared out into the void. He was swinging wide, wide, wider. How he swung to the rhythmic beauty that poured through his being like a deluge of sunlight — on and on — out and out, round and round and round, smaller and smaller growing. He passed the uttermost bounds of size and his smallness increased beyond nothing by great leaps of diminution. And as he grew smaller and smaller, the intensity, the beauty, the all-pervading rhythm of the tone beat upon his soul. Its sheer poignancy, its exquisite rhythm must crush him, must burst in upon him and overwhelm and diffuse his being into itself. Its

beauty of a sudden became intolerable, but still it drew him on and on. Ah now! He realized it must end. An end was approaching. He could sense its sharp, final termination in a definite moment ahead.

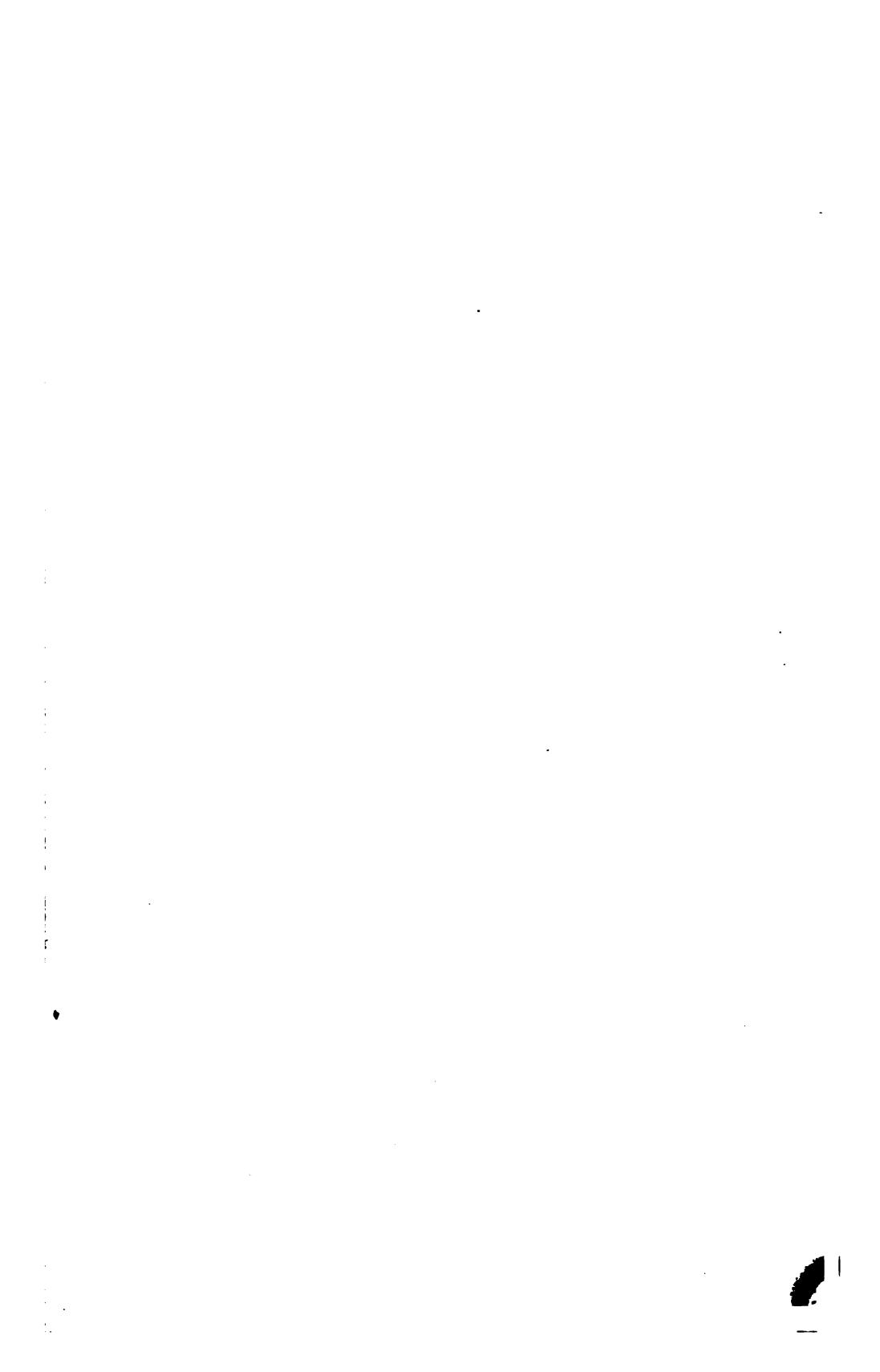
There was an end to it. The tone, it would end. And that would be the end of all things but — He saw now, he felt and heard it with all his being — he smelled it. He would become the tone, the tone would become himself — become the tone — tone — tone — himself. And that would be the end — the end of Melody Jim. The tone would blot out his regret like a feather. It would engulf him in beauty, overwhelm him, bury him deep in exquisite rapture; he would join with it, diffuse in it illimitable being. Already his regret at his futile life was gone. He was lifted up and on and out in greater and greater circles — round and round and round to the rhythmic cadence of the tone.

He was — What was the burden of the tone? Over and over in his mind like a loved hymn of praise it chanted a refrain. He was — “Melody Jim”, it sang with the sweetness of youthful voices, voices of great heart and splendid courage. “Melody Jim” — just that. “Melody Jim, Melody Jim.” The voices grew sweeter, richer, higher, finer, purer. His soul leaped. “Melody Jim — Jim.” How he ripped and roared through the cool air to the refrain — on and on like an express train gathering speed. His skin was cold. He felt a hand on his heart. No, no — Doc’s — no, no, not his, no — Out farther, wider, faster, in circles that wheeled through ages and ages of time — “Melody Jim, Melody Jim . . .”

He could see the end now, feel it with every atom of his being. He could sense its approach. The tone would stop and that would be the end — the end. "Melody Jim, Melody Jim." He began to yearn for the end. The intolerable beauty of the tone appalled him. The end was very close — nearer, nearer. He could reach it. Now. Now. When the approaching moment fell the tone would stop — Now. Now. Now. "Melody Jim — Jim." How his mind whipped over the words! It was coming! Quick! Quick! Now. Now. Now! It was the winding up — a second — less, less, less! The moment was here! Now! Now. The end of things — death — annihilation. Now. Now! Now! Now! — Now! With all his soul, with the last ounce, the last atom of being, he hurled upon the moment.

How queer! The moment had passed. The tone was stopped — and he — he was — this little moment, this tiny residue of being that weltered in a sea of consciousness. Everything was so clear; Kizzie Marie — the perfume of the locust trees — the soft swaying of yellow roses — the sweet smell of his melodeon — it — it was — But this blackness rolling down upon him, this unutterable peace. His soul stretched out to meet it — it was — yes, it was — now. Now! Now!

"Your pa is dead, Kizzie Marie." The wry lips twisted out the words upon the quiet. The twilight still lingered. The perfume of the locust trees blew in at the window. The doctor gathered up his medicines and packed them in his case.



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